シュトヘル
伊藤悠
Hiroshi Ito
13
BIG SPIRITS COMICS SPECIAL

シュトヘル

13

伊藤 悠

Itoh Yu

BIG SPIRITS COMICS SPECIAL

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*LIBERAL TRANSLATION OF THE TANGUT CHARACTERS IN THE COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS. "ONE WHO CLINGS TO THE LIGHT CANNOT HAVE THE DARK. ONE WHO CLINGS TO THE STRONG CANNOT BECOME WEAK. ONE MUST KNOW BOTH LIGHT AND DARK, STRONG AND WEAK."

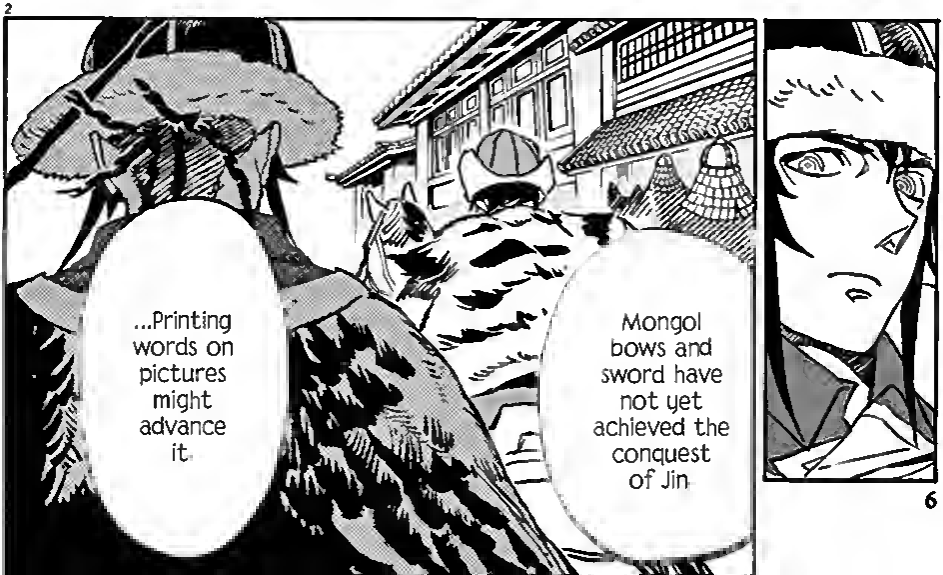
*THE COVER FLAP READS "SUCCESSOR" IN TANGUT SCRIPT

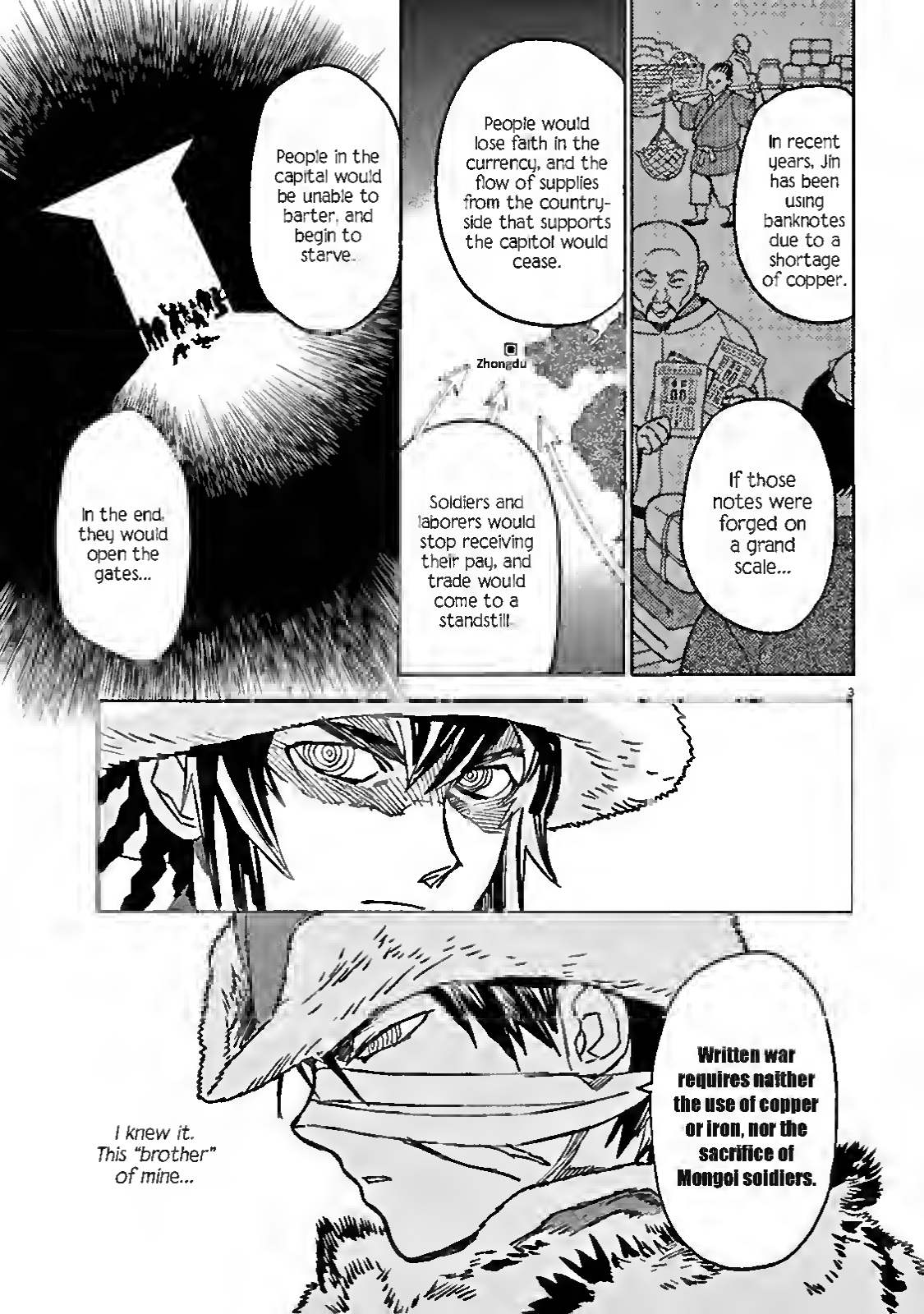
されれば暗を掃らい、
されねばこうはなり

[Chapter LXXIX]

Reunion

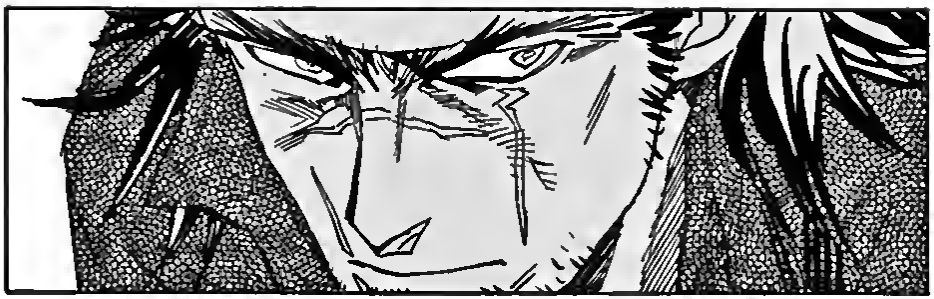
Writing, huh?
When you see it like this, it seems a fleeting thing.
...It may lack the strength to endure fire,
but writing has the power to spread far and live long.


...Printing words on pictures might advance it.
Mongol bows and sword have not yet achieved the conquest of Jin.


In recent years, Jin has been using banknotes due to a shortage of copper.
If those notes were forged on a grand scale...
People would lose faith in the currency, and the flow of supplies from the countryside that supports the capitol would cease.
Zhongdu
Soldiers and laborers would stop receiving their pay, and trade would come to a standstill.
People in the capital would be unable to barter, and begin to starve.
In the end, they would open the gates...
Written war requires naither the use of copper or iron, nor the sacrifice of Mongol soldiers.
I knew it. This "brother" of mine...

is the bane of kings.
It's only a possibility, if Your Highness...
were to become the Great Khan, and to order it.
...Other writing – Tangut writing – could be the key to that...
...That's enough of that for the present.
I'll have plenty of time to hear about it on the road to Chengdu.
After all, you did gouge out your own brother's heart to be here.

There's no wound...



but who would have thought you could fool them with a farm animal's heart?

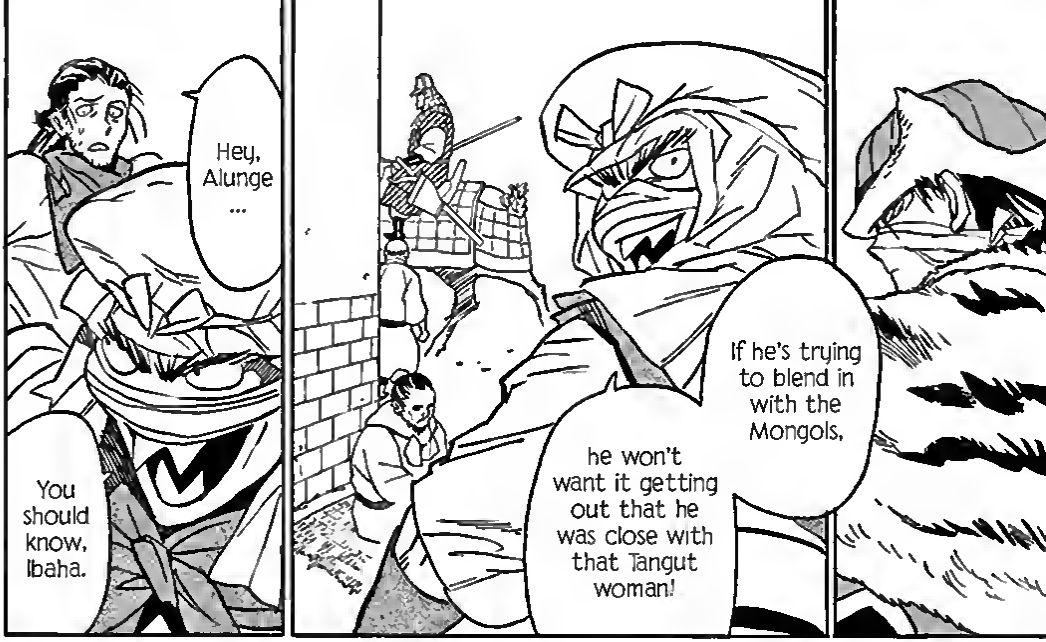
Yurui.
You clearly had it ready in advance.

He's in good with the Mongols. Must be doing well for himself.

There! Look, it's him!

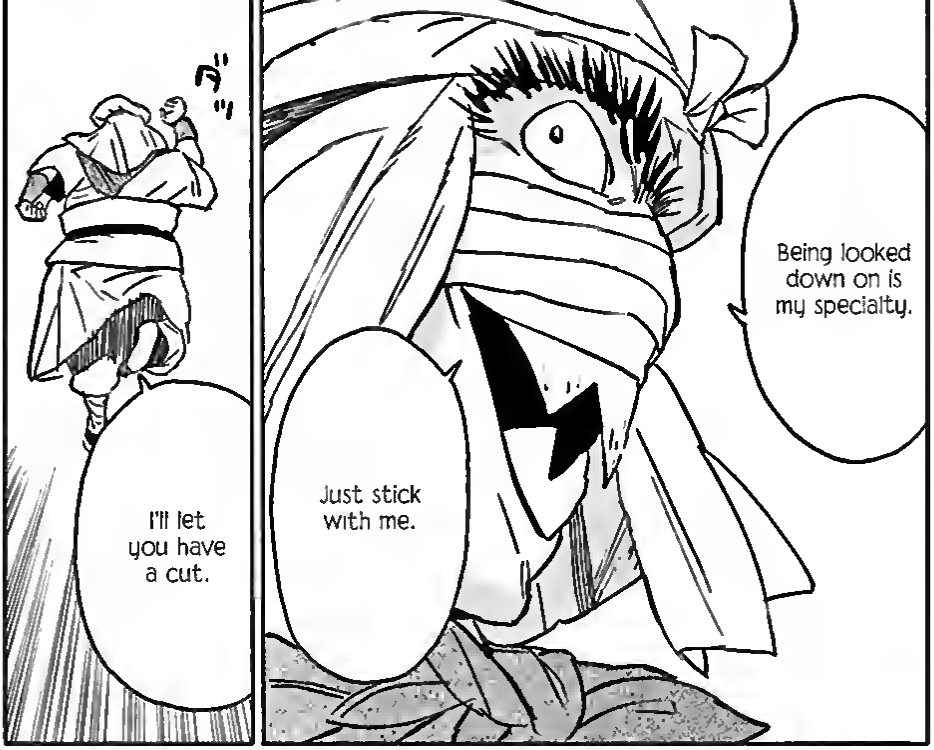
Hey! Over here!
What happened to your girlfriend? We've got a lot to talk about, so come closer!
Hey! You there! Mr. Yurui!
Even if you don't make money, I'm sure some woman'll give you a meal.
If you're scared of a Mongol brat, then you leave off, lady-killer.

I guess she really must be dead...
It looks like Sudoh's not here... Was she not able to find him?
He'll just brush you off like a fly.
Give it a rest, Alunge...


Hey, Alunge ...
You should know, Ibaha.
If he's trying to blend in with the Mongols,
he won't want it getting out that he was close with that Tangut woman!

He can't stand the flies.
He won't even want to touch me, so he'll throw something my way to get rid of me. And he'll keep doing it.
That brat gives himself airs. That's why he's scared of a filthy commoner like me.

You think I'm pathetic?
What's with that look, Ibaha?


Being looked down on is my specialty.
Just stick with me.
I'll let you have a cut.

Oof.

There he goes.

Watch where you're going.
Oh. Sorry.

Iba-
ha.

Sudoh.

I see...
but thankfully my wife brings in a little on the side.
My body's not too handy.
So... Are you not with him – Yurui – anymore?
That really...
Ibaha... back then...
Ow.
ぺん
Don't mention it, dummy.

I'll see him again.
At least he's alive.
So, it'll be fine.
...Yurul.
We've been separated, but I found him again today.

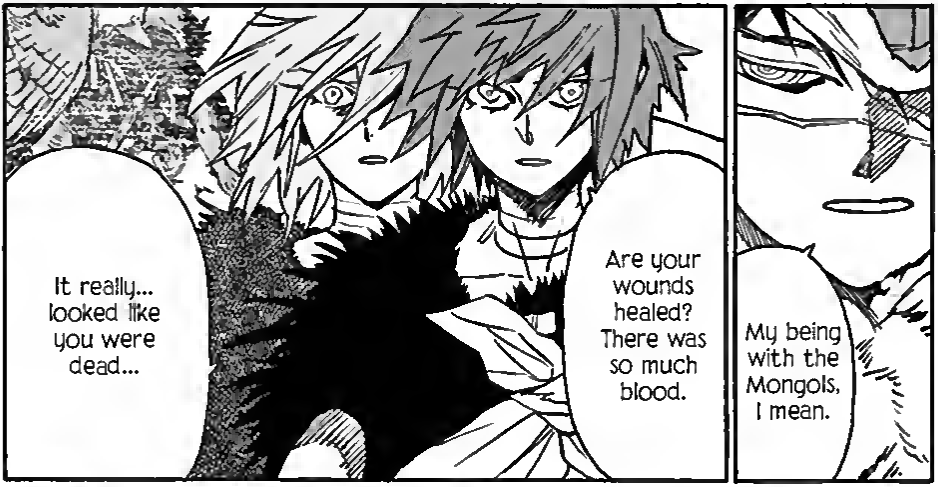
You've got to think these things through.
That would be risky, wouldn't it?
Weren't you guys carrying something you couldn't let them get ahold of?
You going to pop over to the Mongol camp and say hello?

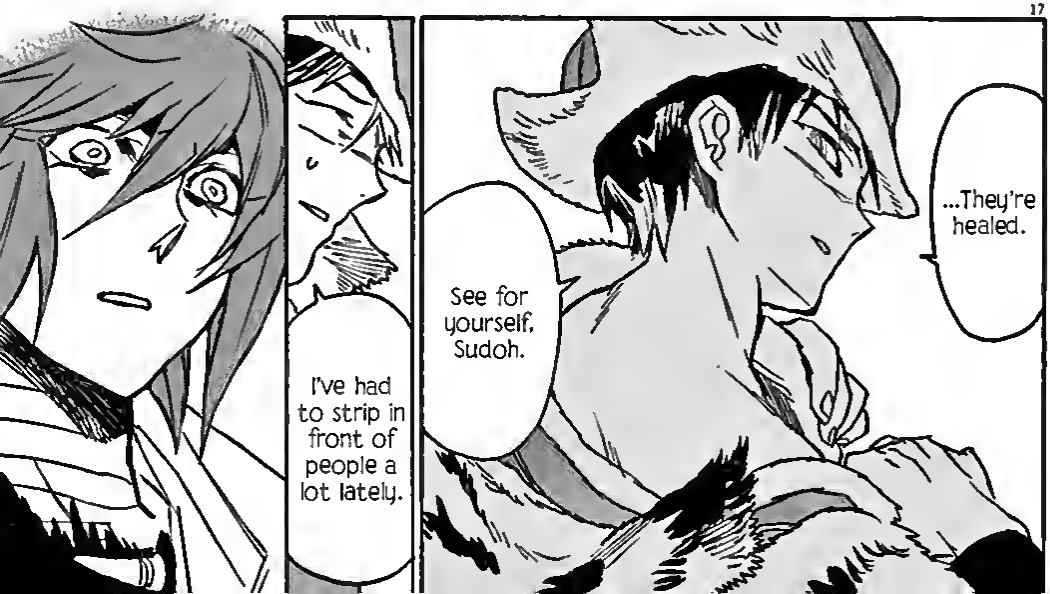
……!
That tune. It's the one I gave him...
It's the tower of the temple that burned down...

Yurul...

You look like you got a bit taller.
And you've got more scars, too.
You must be... Sudoh...
Surprised to see me?

No... I just didn't think I'd see you until we reached Chengdu.
I'm glad.
Shut Hell wouldn't have forgiven me for it.


My being with the Mongols, I mean.
Are your wounds healed? There was so much blood.
It really... looked like you were dead...


...They're healed.
See for yourself, Sudoh.
I've had to strip in front of people a lot lately.

...Why?
Why did you, of all people,
"Slave of
"Western Xia"
have to be branded with those scars?
Back then, for the first time,
Then... I saw the remains of someone I used to talk with.
Someone who probably never thought he was going to die there.
I really thought I was going to die.
Pain and fear seeped into me through the wounds on my back.
If I died, it would all be over.
...And the Tangut script would be lost.

I was confident that the dream would come true one day, in the distant future. I was able to keep dreaming a dream that would never come true in my lifetime.
It's true that your stories about the future of those letters sustained me. It felt like I was watching the stars.
I'm sure you know.
Sudoh.
But... then I realized.
I realized that our writing wouldn't have a future
unless I achieved something before I died.
The age of the Mongols will last a long time. At least as long as I'll live.
This eastern land of Jin won't sate them. They'll keep expanding their territory to the west, and increasing their power.

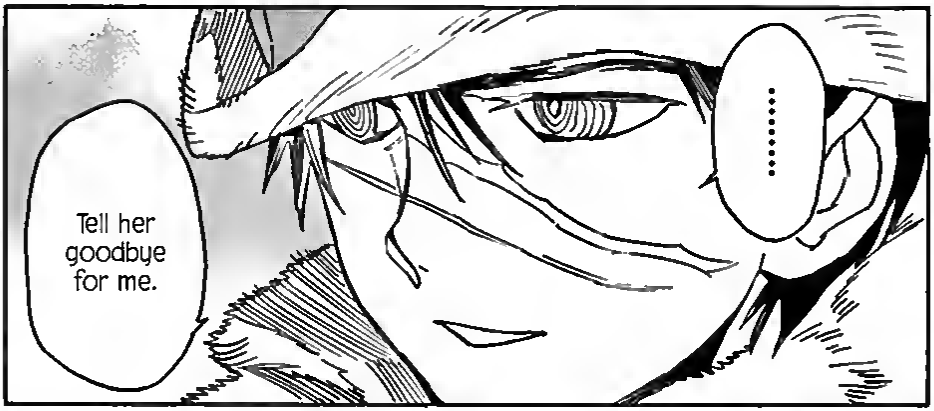
I mean to gain power among the Mongols.
To gain power, and preserve the Tangut script from within their ranks.
But that's...
It would be difficult to keep running preserving the Tangut script from that vast horde.
Even if I hide it again, our writing will die if it goes unused for fifty or a hundred years.

Whether I have to wait five years, or twenty, it's more certain than running and dying.
For now, I'm placing my trust in his successor and biding my time.
It may not be possible under the present Khan, who burns Tangut writing out of hatred.

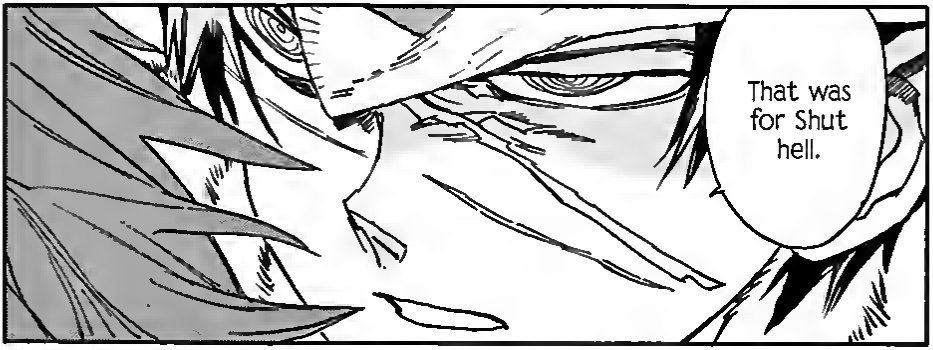
It will be the seed that allows the Tangut script to flower once more.
I just have to prevent the Voice of Jade from being destroyed or scattered until the time comes.

Return the half you carry, Sudoh.

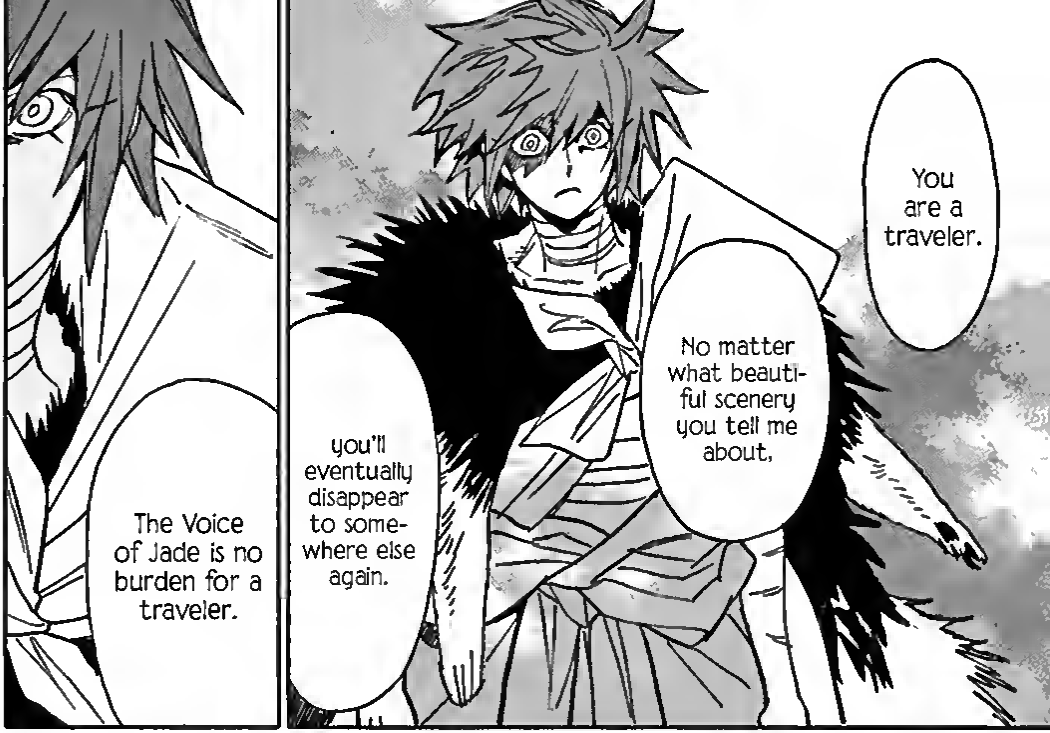
What's your plan for that?
Didn't you say you wanted to live with her...?
And what about Shut Hell?
.....


Tell her goodbye for me.
.....

That's all you have to say...?


That was for Shut hell.

Under-stand what!?
You wouldn't under-stand.
Blech! What the hell? Do that to *her*!


You are a traveler.
No matter what beautiful scenery you tell me about,
you'll eventually disappear to somewhere else again.
The Voice of Jade is no burden for a traveler.

A slave of the Tangut — of writing — should bear it.

Looks like you did a great job worming your way into the Mongols' good books, Yurul.
Yo. I heard your morin khuur.

Who was she famous for killing, again? I wonder if the Mongols know.
Oh man, I'm just so happy to see you again.
And your girl-friend ...

I'm glad to see you too, Alunge.
Whoa
...This guy's the type you couldn't kill if you tried...

for when I have to kill people I know.
You'll be good practice
26
It's his fault for coming to me.
Ngh
Oh
Yu-rui.

Un gh
He was a fool.
He practically killed himself.
Oh

Waagh!

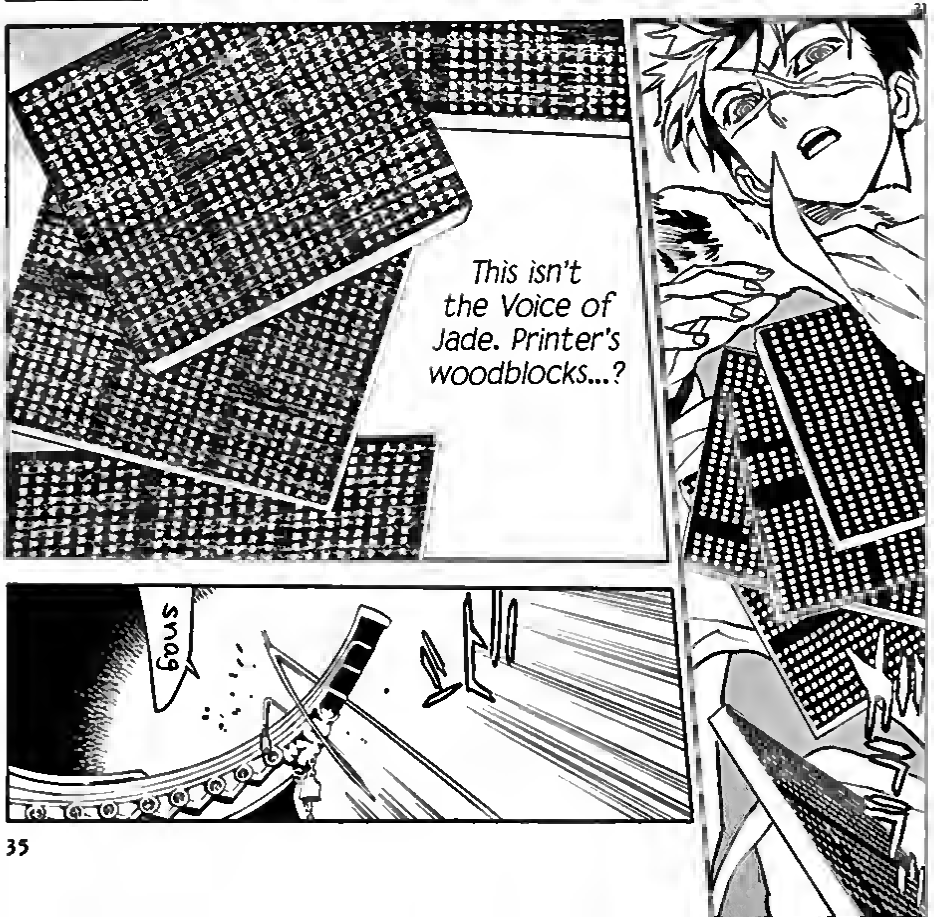
Gah–

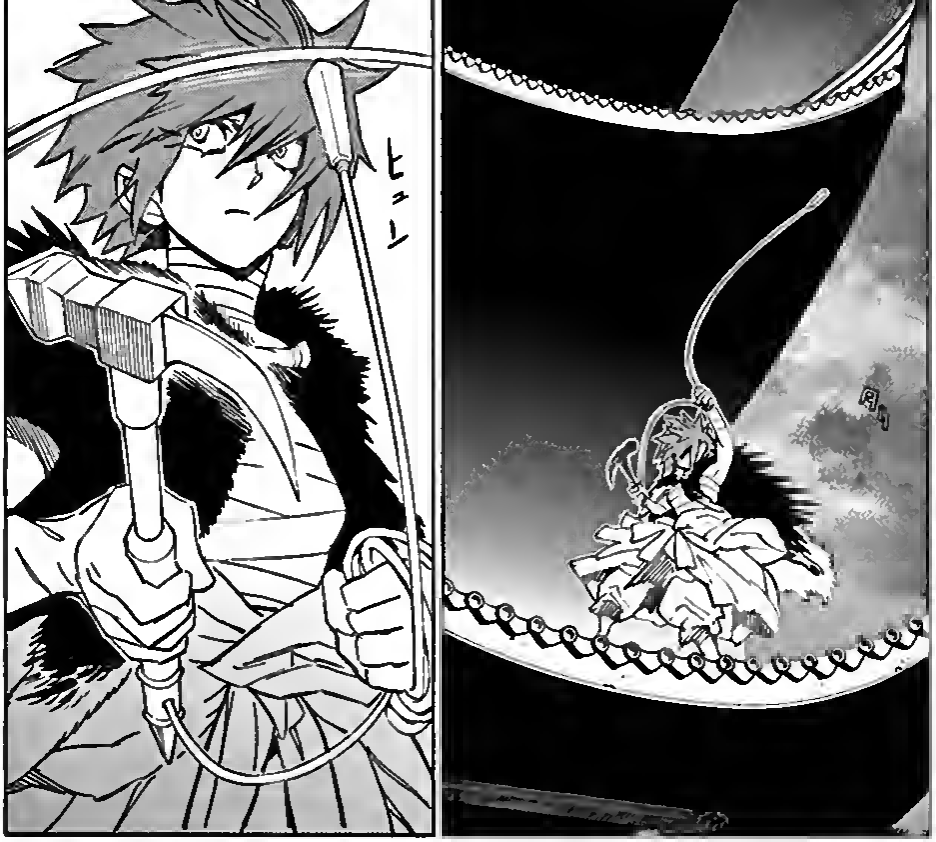
Waa ahh h!
Sssg
Geh!

Ngh
...
Yurul.

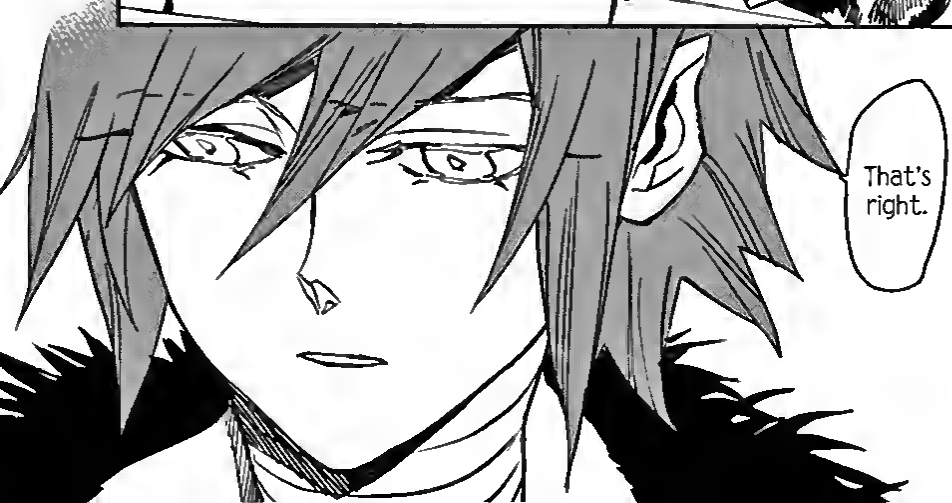
rustle
It's fine.
!
This is what you want, right?

ドサッ


This isn't the Voice of Jade. Printer's woodblocks...?
SNAG


ヒュン

[Chapter-LXXX]



I mean to gain power among the Mongols.
To gain power and preserve the Tangut script
Was it the Mongols?
It was the Mongols.
Yeah...

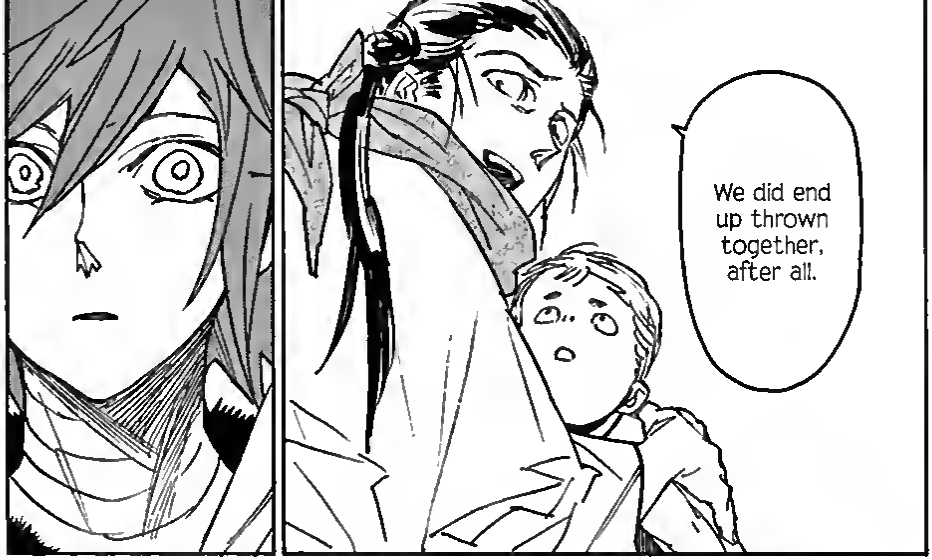
I did tell him to let it go...
Sorry.
You see, Sudoh...
I didn't have time to carry him back.

When I finally ran into him again, he had a big pillory on him. Must have escaped from someplace.
I got it off him and, well, he was pretty happy about it.
Here.
That thing you asked me to look after.
He gave me small change a bunch of times after that. I guess he was trying to repay me.
He knew I had this to live off, but...
Ibaha.

...Thank you.
You were a big help.
What happened to those woodblocks you said you wanted to show him instead?
!!!

Didn't you get to see him?

Well, I'm sure you'll manage to see Yurul again somehow.
You'll do something dangerous again if you're on your own,
so I guess I've got no choice but to come with you.


We did end up thrown together, after all.

...We did.

Hey, kid.
What's a little traveling...?
Besides, it's not like I'm over the hill just yet.
I've got to leave with that friend for a bit.
Look after mom for me.
She left.
Dad,
are you going to leave mom?

That's good.
I got left behind.
No...
I guess it is.
.....

He only finished a few characters.
These woodblocks... He'd only just started carving them.
Was he in a hurry to show me these?

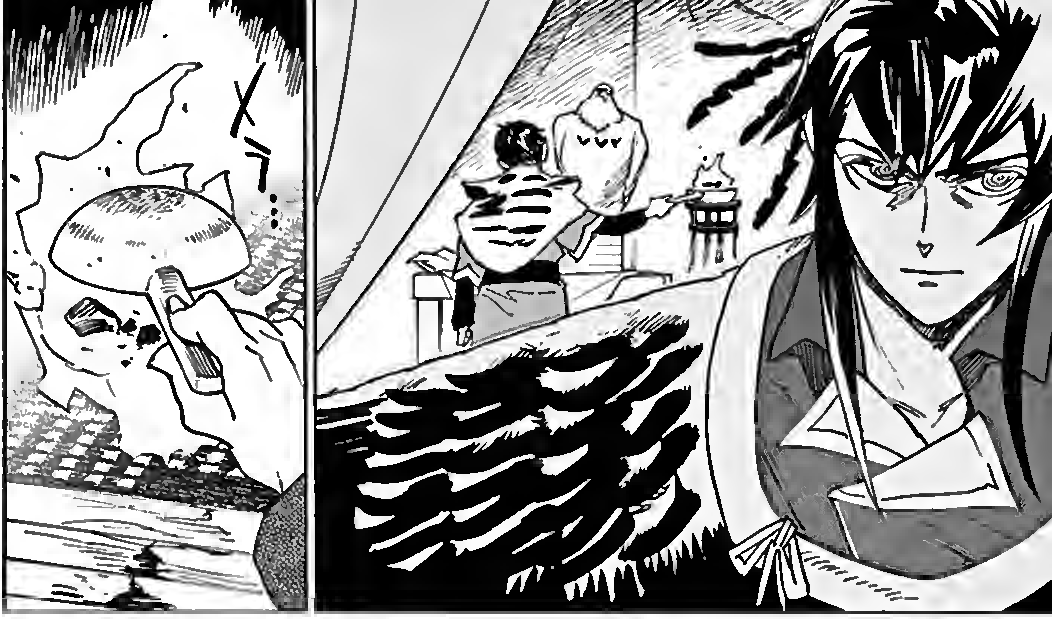
...Carving the Tangut characters that are still being burned away.
Then he'd shave away the wood around them to make woodblocks.
He must have rubbed ink on the surface of the Voice of Jade... then pressed wooden

Sudoh,
who would have thought you'd have the same idea?
you're thinking of the future.
As ever, Sudoh...
And those are?
I wonder if Shut Hell is sleeping...

Yurul?
Have you brought back Shut Hell's Voice of Jade.
Am I being shadowed...?
It wasn't jade.
Does he know I saw Sudoh?
clatter
Last night's reunion was by chance.
If she's taking precautions so you can't steal the Voice of Jade then...
So she passed off a woodblock duplicate on you

We'll meet again in Chengdu.
I'll get her to give me the Voice of Jade then.

We leave tomorrow morning.
Burn it.



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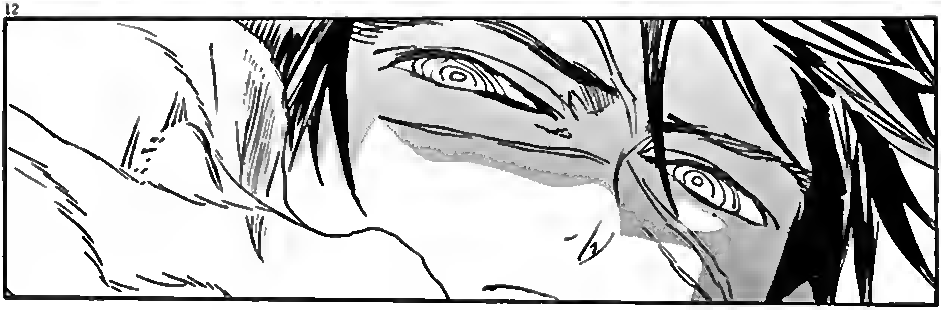
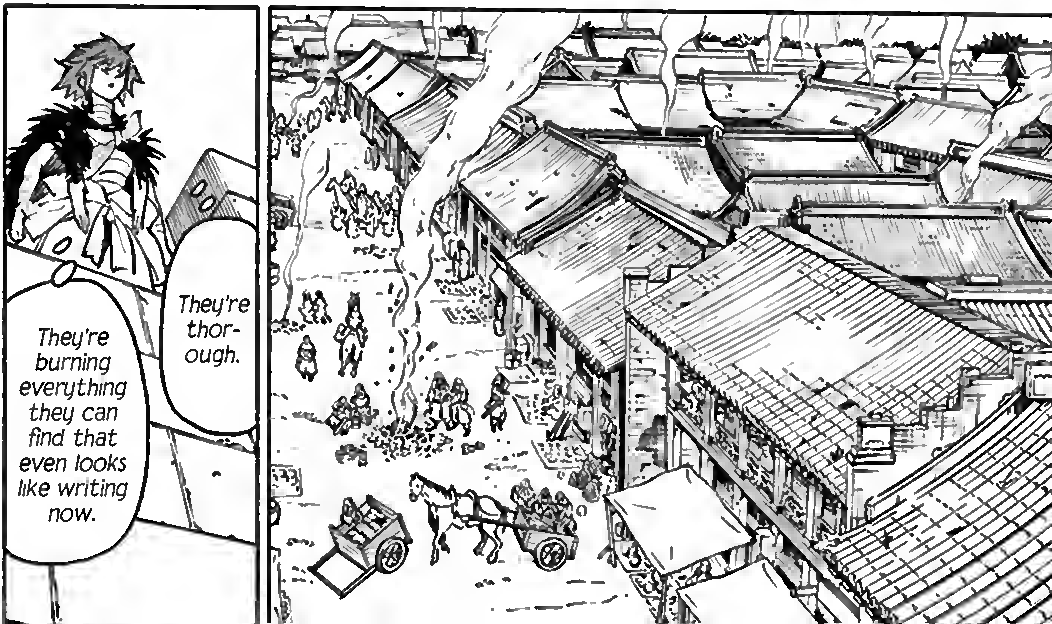
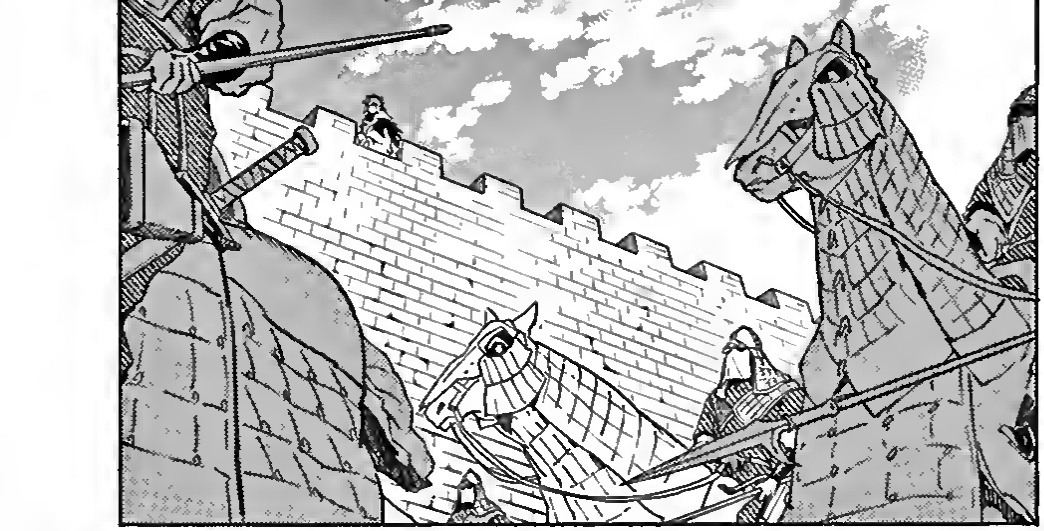



They're burning everything they can find that even looks like writing now.
They're thor-ough.

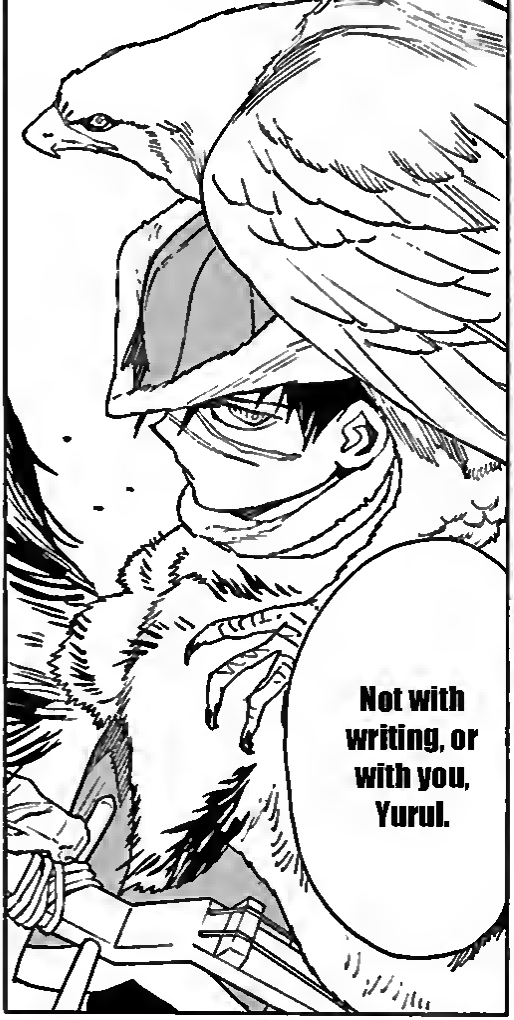


Looks like Yurul's group is leaving the city.
What happened?
And what about gramps? Are you on your own?
It's a bit late to tell me it's none of my business.
"You are a traveler."
The Voice of Jade is no burden for a traveler.
A slave of the Taogut — of writing — should bear it.

Who says only interested parties can get involved!?
It'll all get over-shadowed by who won and who lost anyway, right!?
Where does he get off!?
or get any benefit or loss from it SHOULD be the one to have it!
An outsider who's not gonna break it, or use it,
14
...Hey, Yurul.
That's! why!
Right! Here!
!! Belong!

You, a child the Mongols saw as a traitor, and the Tangut saw as an enemy,
reached out your hand to these letters.
You were neither Mongol nor Tangut, outside of winning and losing, loss and gain.
You just wanted to get involved.

That's why Shut Hell trusted you,
and why you were my friend.
chirp


Not with writing, or with you, Yurul.

I won't back down.
No matter how many times I'm let down or how much I'm tempted, I won't give up meddling.

Guess we'll leave the city on the other side...
Those Mongols already gone?

Just wondering if a book or something might've surivived the fire.
Hey, what're you doing?

No, put that away!
It might even help illiterates like us figure out what this thing says...

Writ-
ing!
Someone still had a piece of Tangut writing!
...Guess there's no choice.

Gyahh!

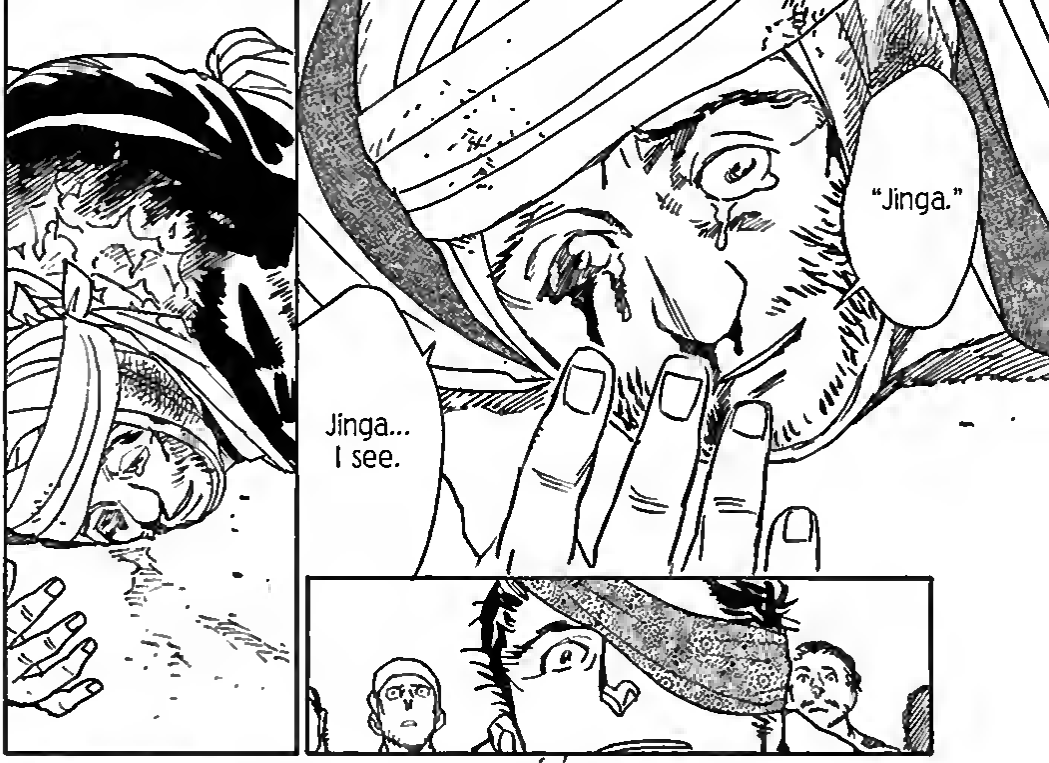
thump

!
ヒュン
21
とぃ
こぃ

It's gonna burn up...!
Ah! It's burning!
Hey, could you be...
Shut Hell?

There. See, it's out...
sizzle
What's written on it...?
What's ...?

Hey, Gaji...
He's... not gonna make it.
Sorry.
We never could manage to read it...
25
...This circled part?
"Jín," "Ga"... It says Jínga.


"Jinga."
Jinga... I see.

So, what was this circled bit?
Hey...
Let us thank you.

That's what we want to thank you for.
It was a word that he... that we needed to know.
Huh ...?
.....

29
28
The tiger...
man...

ズリリ
ズリリ

Chapter LXXXII Gaji

This is a sutra, isn't it? It looks like the Heart Sutra. Even I know that one.
.....
...Right after the Mongols attacked, and we were called up as soldiers to defend Great Xia,*
he got word that his child had been born.
Those are a few lines his wife bought from a local temple for protection.

※ THE PEOPLE OF WESTERN XIA CALLED THEIR OWN COUNTRY "GREAT XIA"

Things turned out that way.
Yours is Gaji, right? Are you the leader... I mean chief?
...A name, huh.
They told her to take that circled part for the kid's name.
But neither he, his wife, nor any of us can read.
I might not look it, but I'm the youngest one here.
I got the job because I went around giving everyone a slap on the ass when they were all depressed back then.

Back then?
You must've seen it somewhere.
3
From our posts, we saw the capital burn down.
I don't know what happened to his house or to the temple.
Pretty soon the Mongols caught us and used us as their human shields.
They made us stand in the way of arrows all over Jin. If we retreated, we'd be shot or stabbed...
Our wounds went untreated and there was never enough food, so most of us died.

Teach 'em to us, then, Mongol Killer.
I
The immortal lady bandit.
I've seen a guy live three days with a festering gut wound, encouraged by rumors of you.
are our characters.
These characters are your...
But at Juyongguan, there was a fire in the Mongol camp,
We've been wandering around in a group like this ever since.
and we just barely managed to escape with our lives.
Anyhow, he was able to learn his kid's name before he died, thanks to you.
You read those characters for us, and—
Those characters?

Come with us, Shut Hell.
Yurui's group is headed west.
Wherever they're going, as long as Yurui is with the Mongols, he won't be far from the Voice of Jade.
Even if it isn't strapped to him, it must be somewhere in that column.

It's too big. Not yours, I take it?
Don't fall.

...Wasn't it vanity?
Wasn't it fatigue that killed you?
But... if the Voice of Jade still has the power
I've found a reason to pursue the Voice of Jade
to curse the Great Khan, father of the Mongols, and his followers...
Until the futility catches up to me.
Boldu.

It's not Mongol pursuers.
I only sense one.

10
Those fire arrows.
A man who's prone to fire isn't planning to run.
From lower ground.

Z z z
snort
Z z z
...There were nights like this.

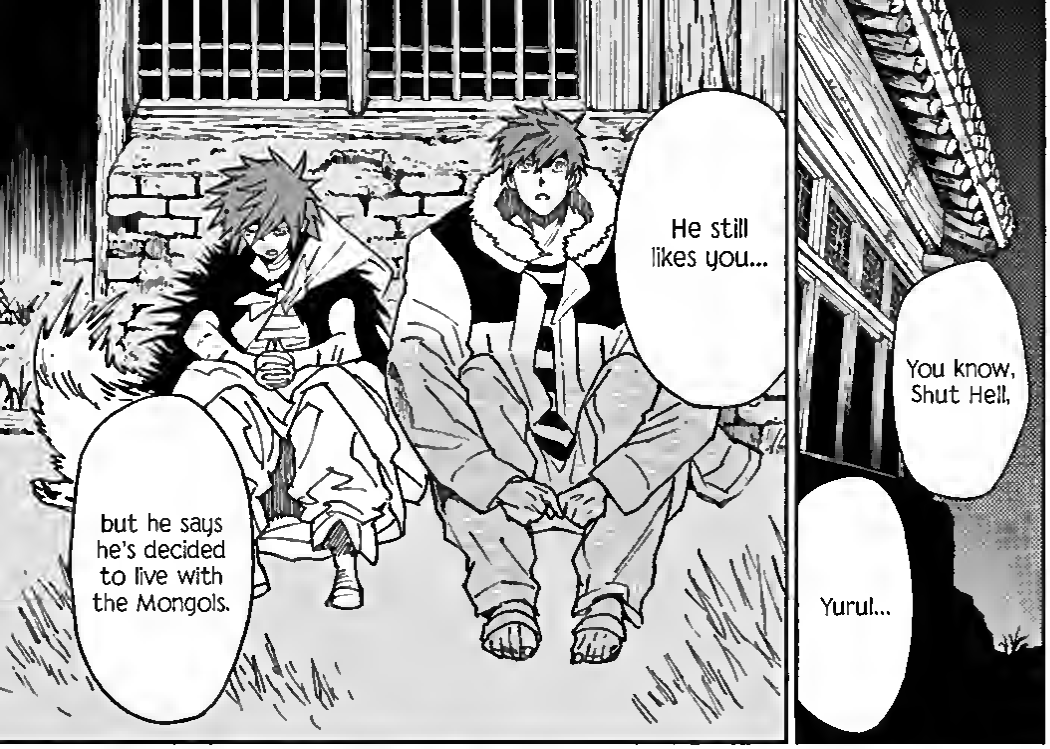
Even when I woke up alone, I was surrounded by people breathing in their sleep.

So you are awake... Shut Hell.

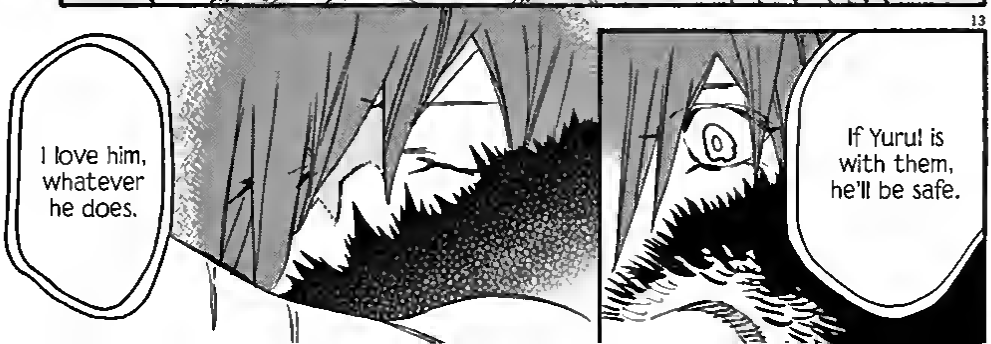
.....

but all that is done now.
I will never forget his presence.

You woke up when you sensed Yurul's brother, the Tiger Man.
What were you planning to do about him?

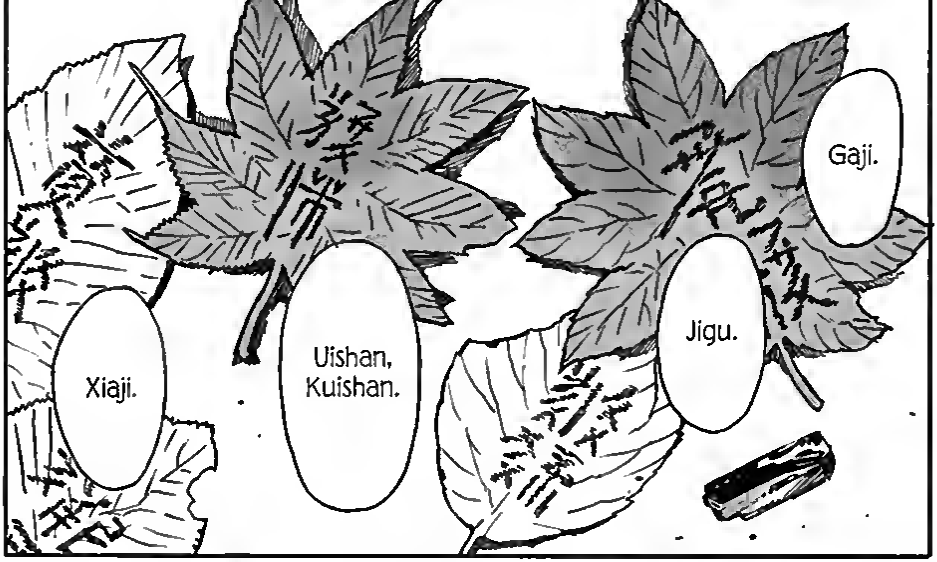

He still likes you...
but he says he's decided to live with the Mongols.
You know, Shut Hell,
Yurul...

Sudoh.
I'm sure you would've said something to him.
Sudoh.
Sorry.


I love him, whatever he does.
If Yurul is with them, he'll be safe.

That's...
Is that what you two mean by "living together"?
...I was sure you'd be pissed at me.
Even if he's far away, if he's alive, and safe,
and he has his heart set on something, that's enough.
On the contrary,
I owe you more than I can ever repay.
You gave me life when I was dying. I latched onto you...
and you could no longer go home.
I'm going to let go of you now.

Shut Hell.
Our promise was till Chengdu.
and your own life.
Go home, Sudoh. To your own time and your own land.
I don't know how to get back, either.
That'll be the end for sure.
We'll meet Yurul again in Chengdu...
Yeah.


Gaji.
Jigu.
Uishan, Kuishan.
Xiaji.

These are your names.
Practice with leaves and charcoal.

Also Guiliki, and Labei.

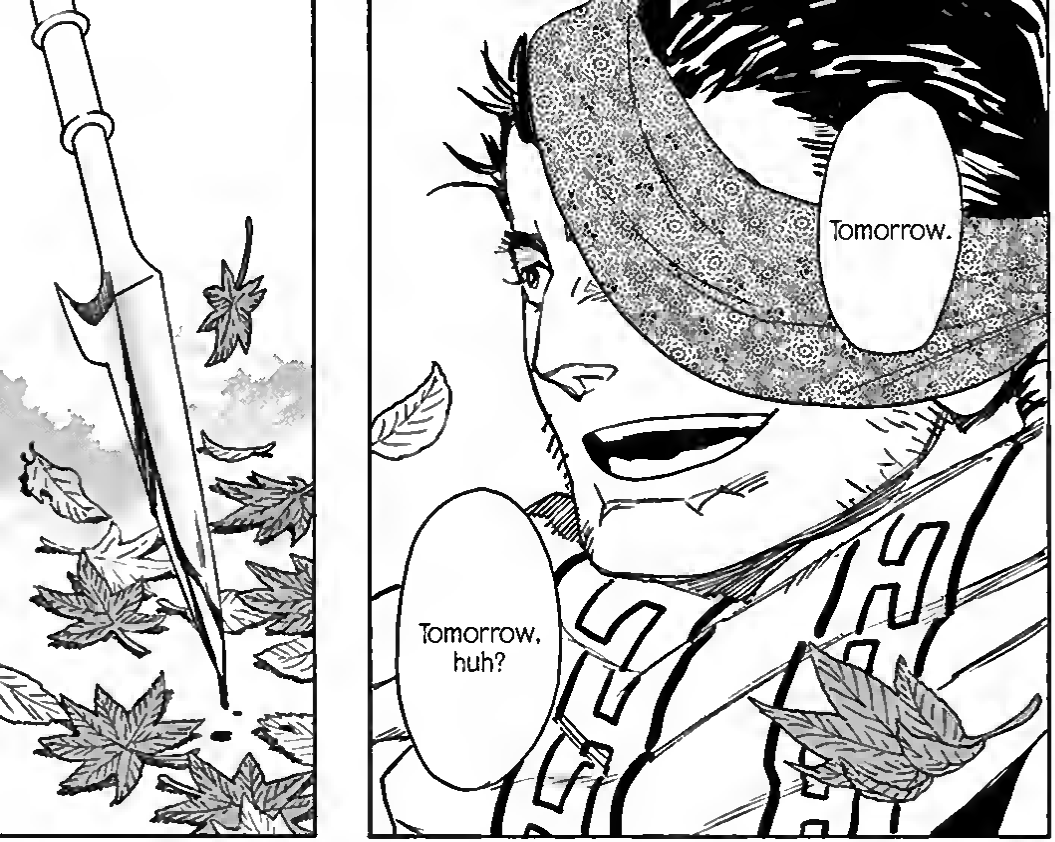
A'chon.
A'chon, huh? Alright...

Hey, Gaji,
what about the guy with the kid?
What was his name?

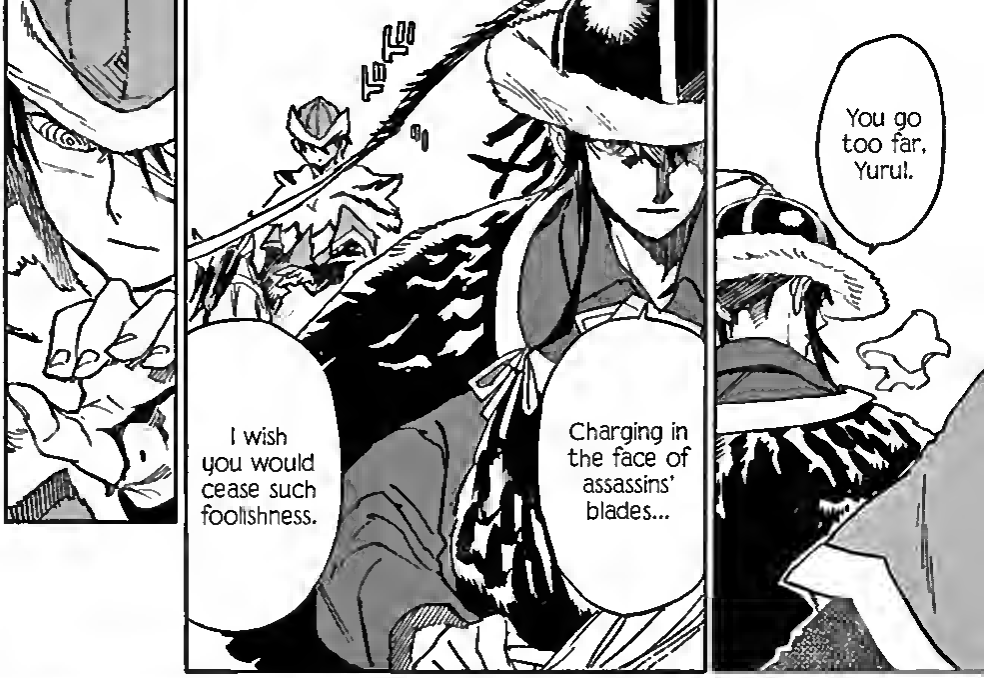
Guiliki, Labei, Nonjieji, Lajieron,
Suiui.
You've got a good memory.
Nonjieji, Lajieron, Suiui...
There are more:
I can't waste time thinking of new things, or funny jokes.
That's what I set my heart on.
Didn't I tell you I'm the youngest and most together of this bunch?
Ha ha. That's right.
I've got to remember them.
That's why
17
and we may just wither up and blow away like these leaves,
Shut Hell, our country may have been burned and taken,
Let me see.
No way, it's too bad.

Scatter to the winds!
But this writing –
our writing – sure is pretty...
Yeah, it is.
I understand, Shut Hell.
Huh?
Well I don't.

But I already know the characters.
I can write them as many times as it takes.
You can scatter them!
And scatter them!
Then you should be fine now, Gaji.
They never stop scattering.
You can think up new jokes,
or even think about tomorrow.


Tomorrow.
Tomorrow, huh?

My elder brothers have been sending more assassins.
Autumn has come, and the main Mongol army has lifted its siege of the Jin capital...
Even the Great Khan has returned to his great pavilion on the steppes.
It must be an easy time for fellows like these to creep out of the wood-work.


You go too far, Yurul.
I wish you would cease such foolishness.
Charging in the face of assassins' blades...

...You do not belong to me.

Veronika?
When this ceases to be a sin...
will you smile for me again.
I told you to retire.
I can't.
I intend to stick to you from now on.
If you can't take orders, you're worse than a prisoner.
How long do you intend to cling to me?

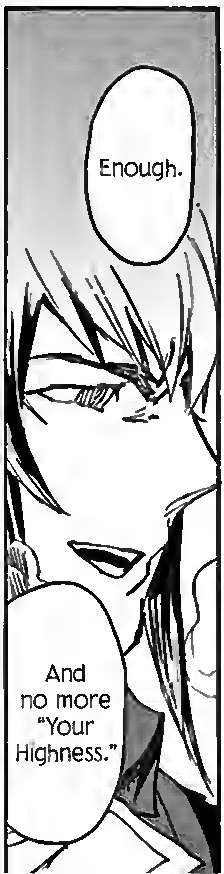
It would be a problem if something happened like it did today.
They won't stop coming.
It seems you care more about losing someone to preach to,
than you do about the next Khan, Yurul.
He's hurt by his brothers' assassins, and tired of lusting for his father's mistress!
He wants someone he can trust, and who will trust him.
I'll find an opening.
I'll slip in like a snake...
Lend me that.
Your hands are dulling its original sharp sound.

pluck
.....
hum
The workmanship is strange, but of good quality.
Yes.
It's my prized possession.

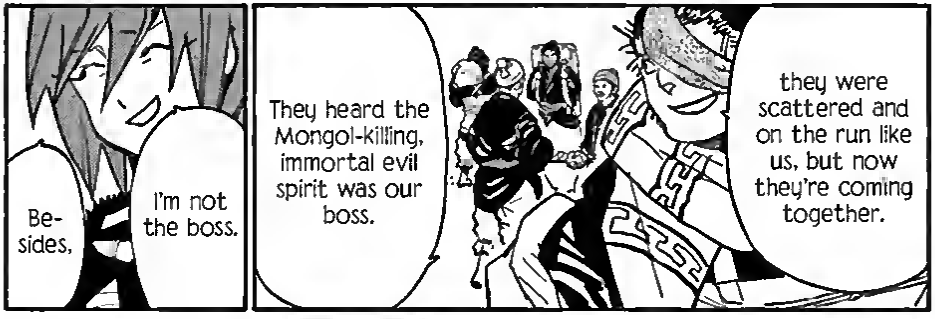
I'm the one who's surprised.
So you can lie. I'm surprised.
.....
Such a gentle sound.

...It's almost hard to believe.
It really is a gentle sound, Your Highness.

any good tunes, Yuru!?
...Do you know


Enough.
And no more "Your Highness."

Shut Hell,
we've got more new faces.


Be-sides,
I'm not the boss.
They heard the Mongol-killing, immortal evil spirit was our boss.
they were scattered and on the run like us, but now they're coming together.

27
Say, isn't that jade? Looks like it'd fetch a crazy price...
Is it really okay to smear ink on it?
The woodblocks for the textbook will be done soon, Gaji.
this is all I'm doing.

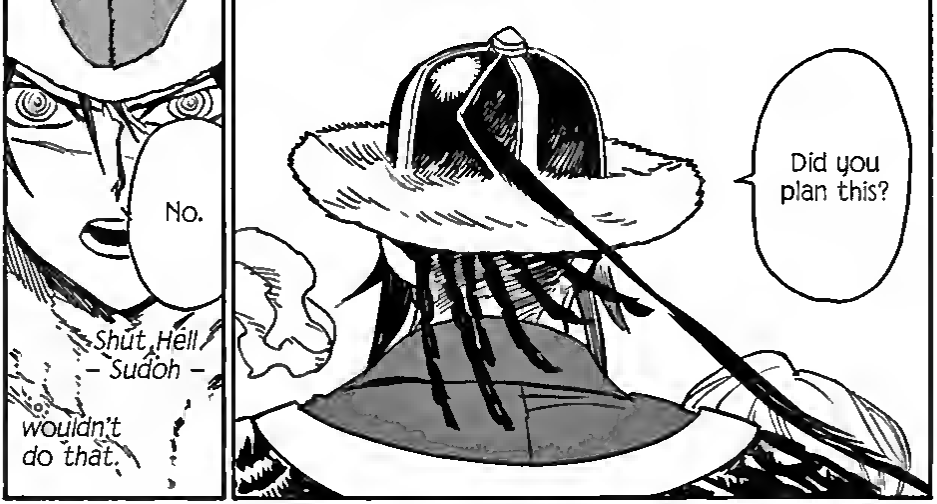
It doesn't matter.
It's something for us to use, not a decoration or something to sell.
So a treasure like this belongs to us?
That's pretty incredible.
We've gotta find someplace to roost and some laboring jobs...
I mean, living on the road's pretty tough with a family this big.
...Was studying really that fun...?
When you first get eyes, you'll look at anything.
When you get legs, you'll run, and when you get a voice, you'll try singing.

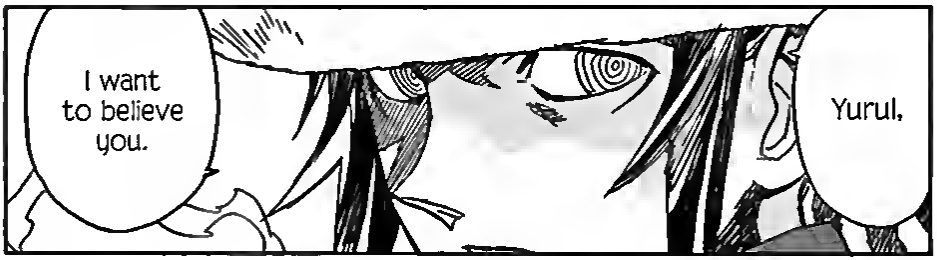
I kind of wish
I'd tried harder back home...
I guess so... I get it.
I understand. I can see Shut Hell's feelings and memories more clearly than ever before.

That life feels more like a dream now.
But it's all getting hazy.
Except for her.
Aah...
I wish I could've seen her one more time...

When did you get this bruise on our leg?
Huh?
I don't know. Maybe when I fell off the tower. With Alunge.
Then I'll disappear, and return this body to her.
Sudoh.
It feels like I'm dissolving, along with my memories. I guess I'm being absorbed into Shut hell.
30
Sudoh.
Be sure not to get any injuries that bleed.
Umm...
And what about this scraped elbow?
It's weird. That was a while ago.
My wounds...
have stopped healing...?

Tolui.
I heard your summons.
Have you learned to play that tune?
It appears that Shut Hell is gathering soldiers to rebel against us.
Yurul,
you met Shut Hell, and let her go...

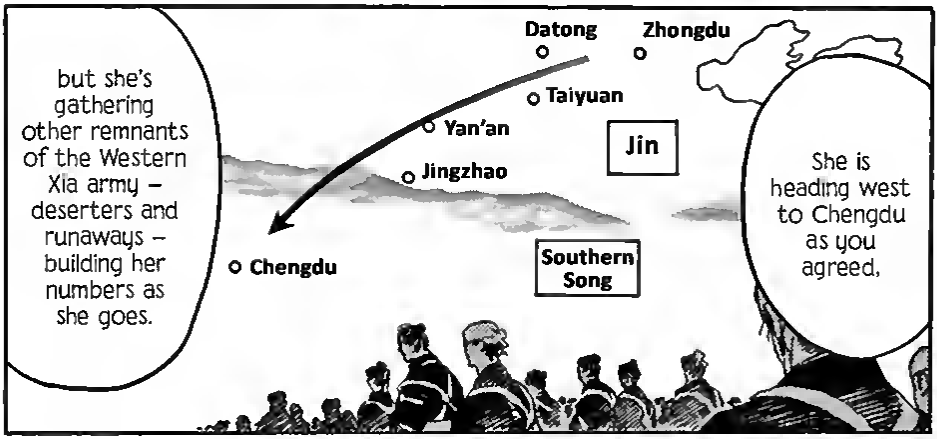

No.
Shut Hell – Sudoh – wouldn't do that.
Did you plan this?

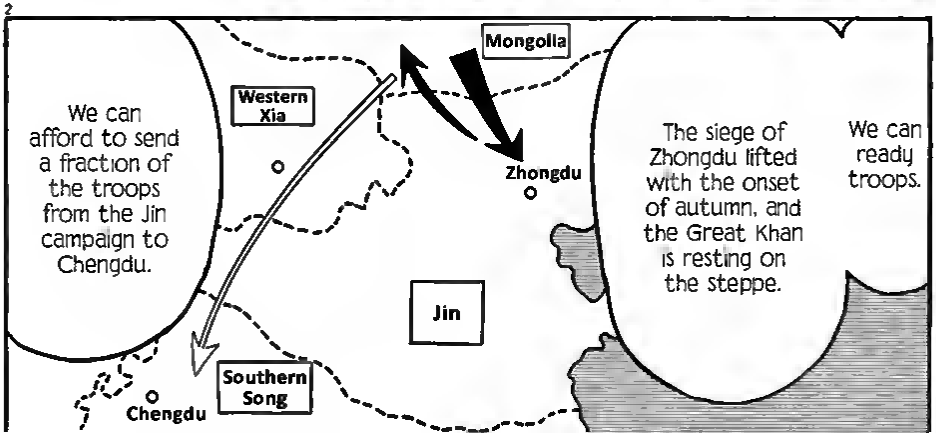

I want to believe you.
Yurul,

I will accept the head of "Shut Hell," chief of the rebel army, from your hands.
Along with the remaining half of the Voice of Jade.

[Chapter LXXXIII] Border Crossing

but it seems your plan's gone astray. She is a bandit, after all.
Yurul.
You said you would lure Shut Hell to Chengdu, and steal the Voice of Jade from her...

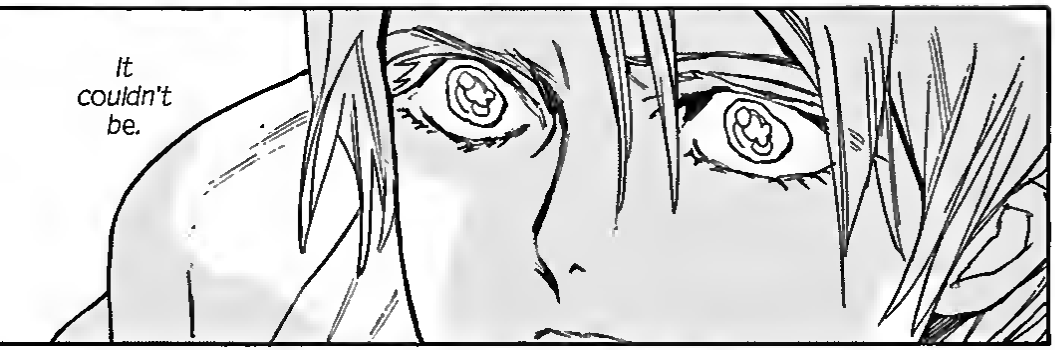

but she's gathering other remnants of the Western Xia army – deserters and runaways – building her numbers as she goes.
Datong
Zhongdu
Taiyuan
Yan'an
Jingzhao
Jin
Chengdu
Southern Song
She is heading west to Chengdu as you agreed,


2
We can afford to send a fraction of the troops from the Jin campaign to Chengdu.
Mongolia
Western Xia
Zhongdu
Jin
Southern Song
Chengdu
The siege of Zhongdu lifted with the onset of autumn, and the Great Khan is resting on the steppe.
We can ready troops.

Do you intend to make war on Chengdu...?
In order to slay Shut Hell.
If necessary, brother.
Please, Tolui. I'll go to Chengdu,
and talk to Shut Hell once more myself.
Troops won't be necessary.

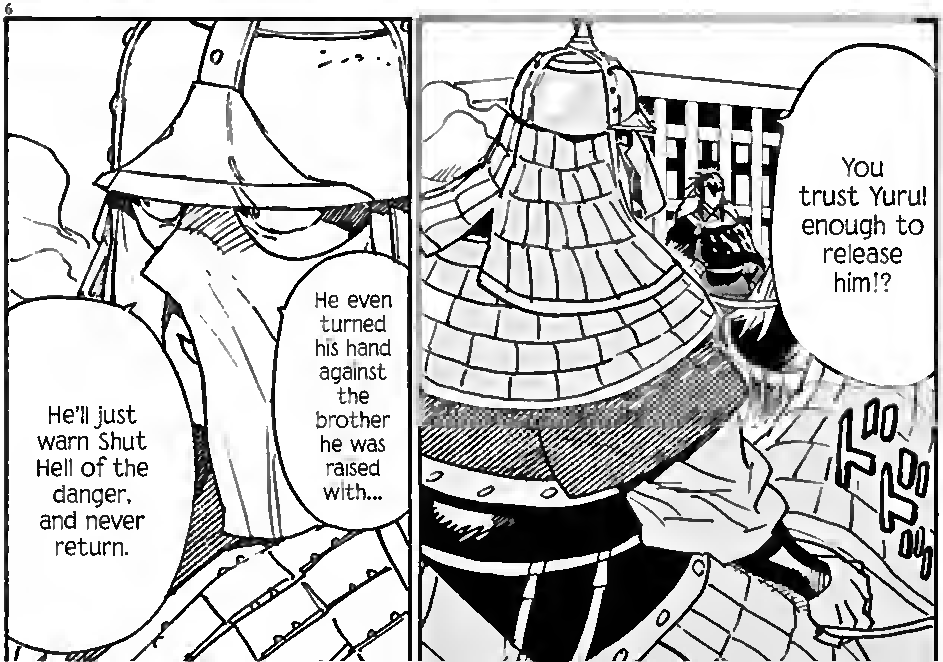
I told you to bring back Shut Hell's head with your own hands, Yurul.
You told me to return with her head, and the other half of the Voice of Jade.
I see. In that case, there need be no war...
I will not wait long, Yurul.

It will belong to you and me.
Once he returns with Shut Hell's head and the Voice of Jade, I will leave the Tangut script unburned...


It couldn't be.

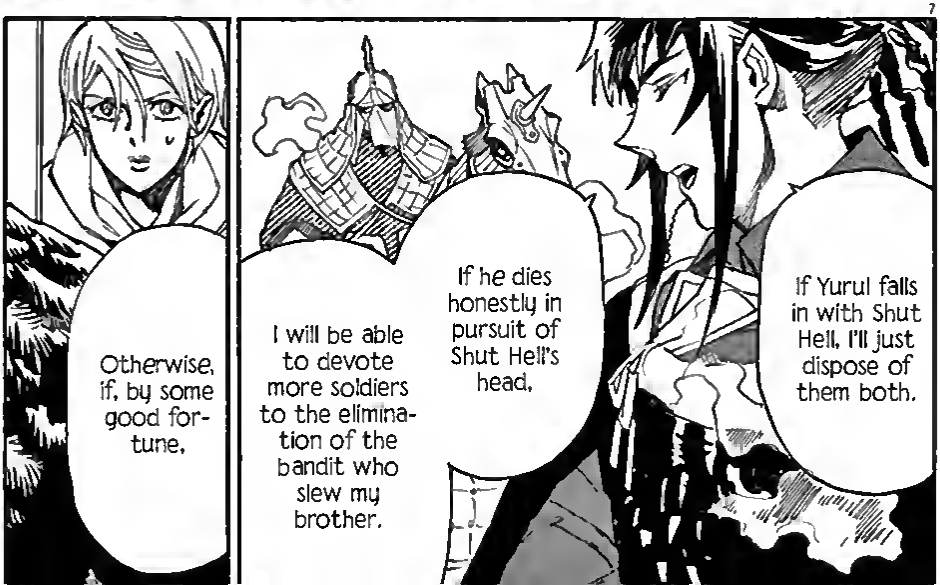
Does Lord Tolui intend...
to rebel against my lord? Against his own father?
It will be our hidden blade against the Great Khan... just as you wished.

When you attended my father... did you see his back?
You need not answer, Veronika.
Lord Tolui...
!!!

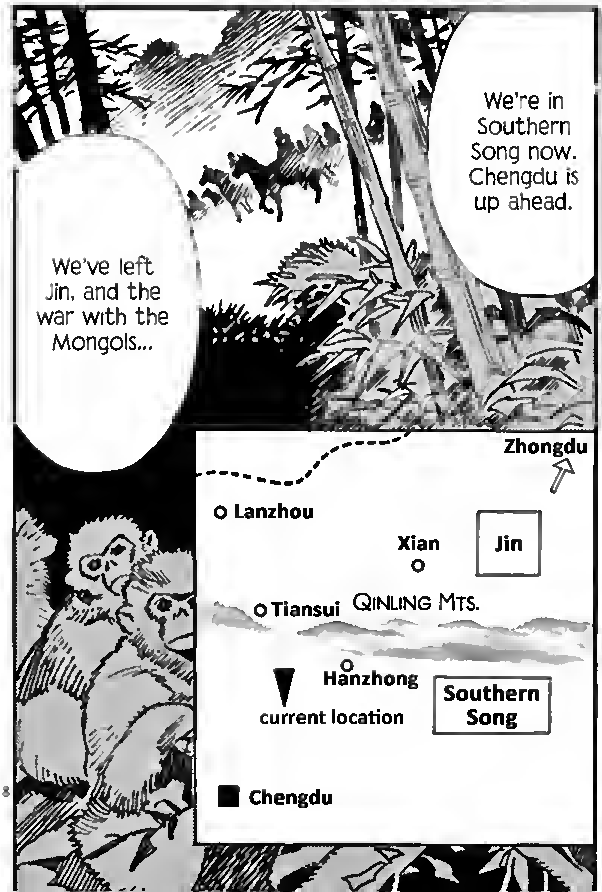

He'll just warn Shut Hell of the danger, and never return.
He even turned his hand against the brother he was raised with...
You trust Yurul enough to release him!?

I kept Yurul to track her movements,
Shut Hell carried off half the Voice of Jade.'
but I released him because I do not care if he comes back.
He'll come back if he wants the Voice of Jade.
I'm not worried about that,

but now Shut Hell has gathered a large band of Western Xia deserters. We need no longer fear losing track of her.


Otherwise, if, by some good fortune,
I will be able to devote more soldiers to the elimination of the bandit who slew my brother.
If he dies honestly in pursuit of Shut Hell's head,
If Yurul falls in with Shut Hell, I'll just dispose of them both.

Yurul does return with Shut Hell's head. I will praise his loyalty and keep him at my side.
As my eternal shadow.


We're in Southern Song now. Chengdu is up ahead.
We've left Jin, and the war with the Mongols...
Zhongdu
Lanzhou
Xian
Jin
Tiansui
QINLING MTS.
Hanzhong
current location
Southern Song
Chengdu

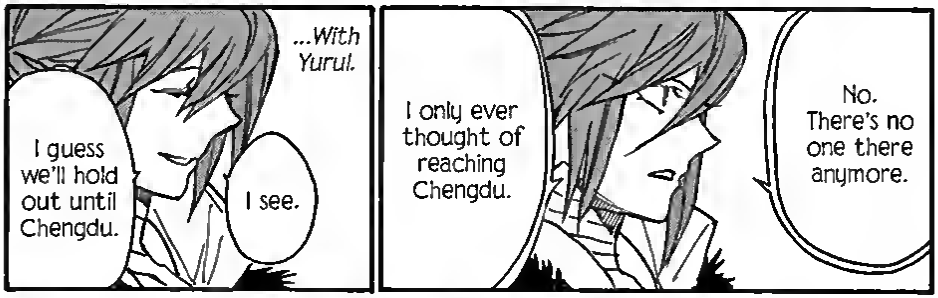
whinney
neigh
The scenery changed once we crossed the mountains.
It's winter, but the river's not frozen.
chirp
chirp

Deserters get beheaded if they ever go back to their own country.
We can't go home.
You could always just head north... toward your home town.
Say... Shut Hell, is that a scrap of your clothes?
What are you writing?
I can't read a word of it.
That makes sense. It's Japanese. Umm, writing from another country.
There's no one who can read this now.
I thought I'd better write it down before I forget.
My address, the name of my school, etc. My memory's of that time are full of holes.
My place in this body is getting smaller and smaller.

She'll come when I disappear and make room.
Shut Hell is awake.
I wanted to go home someday.
I had to return it someday.
Shut Hell said so.
She should have died, but she caught onto me and came back.
10
I'm like an IV drip... When it's gone,
It sucks...
her body won't last long.
But this time it's Shut Hell's body that's weakening.

It's strange. Your breath doesn't turn white.
Nothing.
What's that?
Aa...
It's 'cause I'm a ghost.
Huh? That's funny. I guess they do call you the evil spirit.
Land-marks, huh?
plop
11

if you live long enough, want to go back to your home town?
Shut Hell.


...With Yurul.
I guess we'll hold out until Chengdu.
I see.
I only ever thought of reaching Chengdu.
No. There's no one there anymore.

And I definitely want to see Suzuki.
We've just decided to say a proper goodbye in Chengdu.
If I make it home, I'm going to give it a proper cleaning...
go to school, and really listen when my friends are talking.
I wanted to stay involved,
but we don't talk about Yurul anymore.
It won't do any good, with our life counting down.

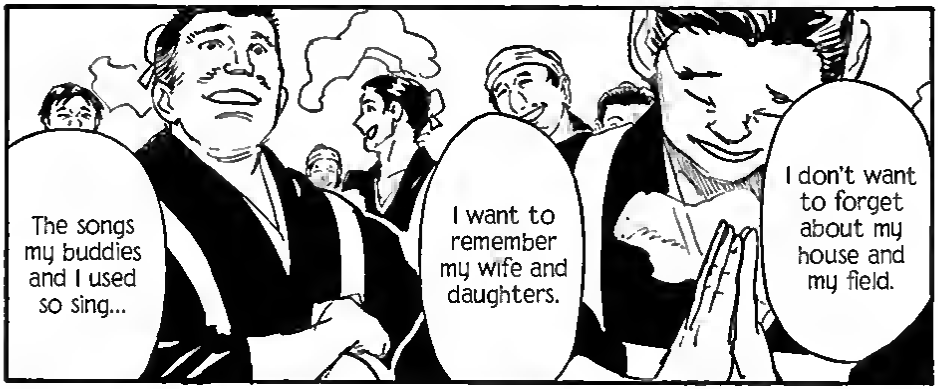
I wish I could have done something for you, too.
I want to ask her out to eat, and to the beach, and stuff.
I can't show you, Shut Hell.
The beach?
13
I guess it's all hopeless now.
Woah?
Look, Sudoh.
Holding my shoulders and stuff?
You trying to play the cool guy, Shut Hell?

You were the one who gave them, and me, writing.
by making connec-tions and conveying meaning.
Yurul said that
it's possible to live
have lived like that.
I could never
But now, at the end... I am.
I'm living like he said...
It's because you were here, Sudoh.
With me.
...Yeah.

Gaji! What's wrong?
So there you are, Shut Hell.
We're together until we die.
It's done!
It's wood, not jade, but this is our voice.

And we can read a little now.
You said this was only half, but it's still amazing.
Every single character. No mistakes.
We all checked.
I can tell that they carefully, carefully carved each and every stroke.
...I guess you'll be wanting the other half soon.
Wow.
It's like it's alive...
...Is this how you felt, Yurul?

Really good.
That's a good idea.
So I don't forget them.
Once...
Once I know how to read and write, I'm going to write about A'chun and his son, Jinga.


The songs my buddies and I used so sing...
I want to remember my wife and daughters.
I don't want to forget about my house and my field.

17

Well, my own satisfaction, I guess.
...I've got someone I can't see again too. You might say it was just for me.
Everyone doing a lot better things to writing.
How about you? You said you were writing down something you didn't want to forget.
For yourself...

When I'm able to write my own words, for my own sake,
will you read them for me?
Then we'll write about you.
Just tell me now, Gaji.
What do you want to write?
When I'm gone, you know?
If my writing can bring out what I feel here?
He he.
You're going to write "thank you" on all of those?
but I'm going to practice just that bit first.
There's more,
Well, thank you, to start with.

If we copy the other half you have... we'll have all the Tangut characters.

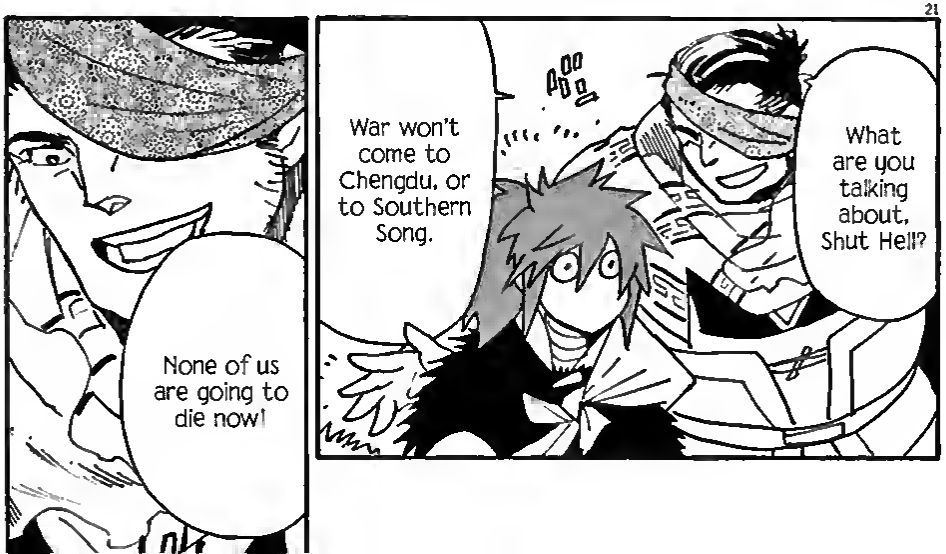
Gaji and the other will raise those seeds themselves, for themselves.
Just like growing the barley and rice they're going to eat.

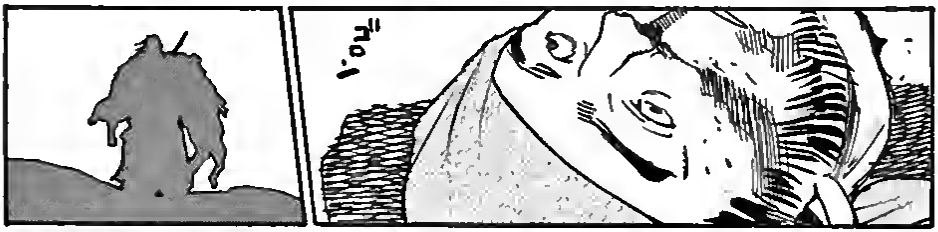
I want to show you,
Yurul.

You said the Tangut writing you held onto so desperately
was alive, not just a fragile treasure to be protected.

You said you'd seen our writing flower.

I know, why don't we all become teachers?
If we do that, everyone can teach the next guy.
I see.
I'll definitely stay alive
until you become a teacher...
I needed you to teach me.
You talked about tomorrow.
...Gaji!


What are you talking about, Shut Hei!?
War won't come to Chengdu, or to Southern Song.
None of us are going to die now!


No!

Who...?
Stop, Gaji.
He was a new-comer, but he was still a friend.
No one was supposed to die anymore.

I'll handle this.

Shut Hell.
Your nose has grown dull.

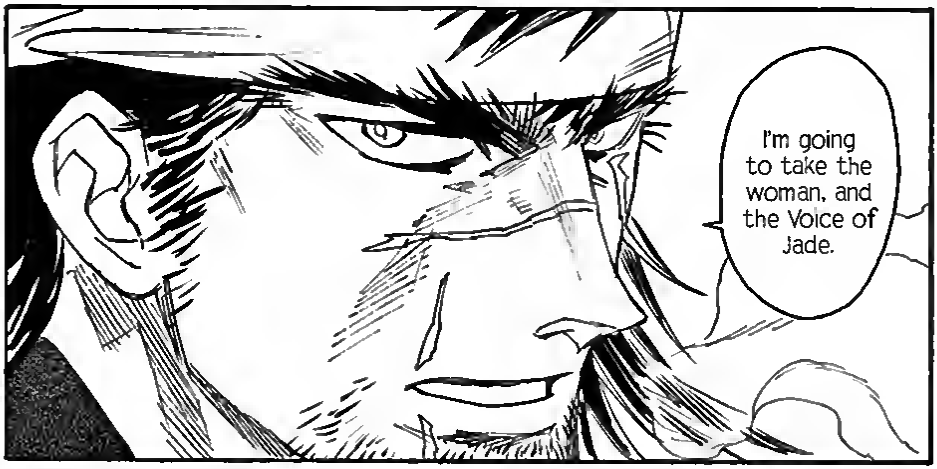
That man was telling the Mongols your position.
He was leaving a trail of pebbles so you could be followed.

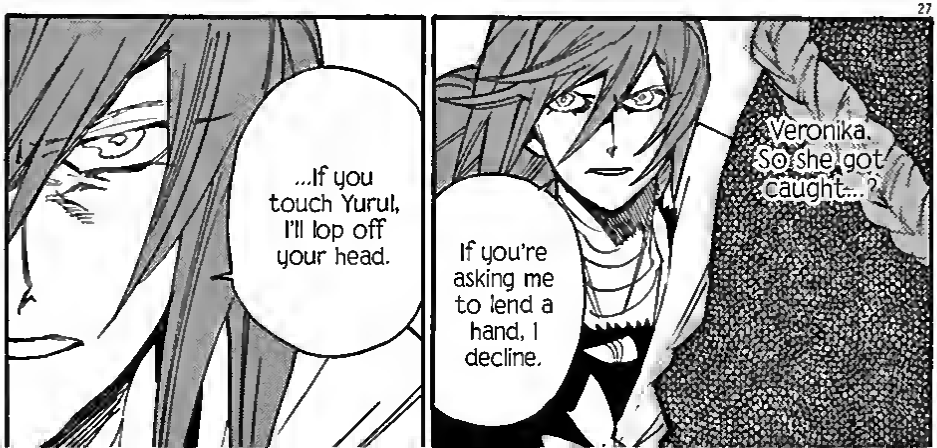
clatter

I see.
.....
Boldu is dead.
He said that half the Voice of Jade was in your hands.
Yurul ran to the Mongols with the other half.

What woman?
And that woman is with them.
The force Yurul wormed his way into is chasing you.

The one with gold hair and blue eyes. They call her "Veronika."
I don't know if she's earned their displeasure or she's taken ill, but she rides in a cart like a cage.
That woman knows about the Great Khan's back.
That it's the same as Yurul's.


I'm going to take the woman, and the Voice of Jade.

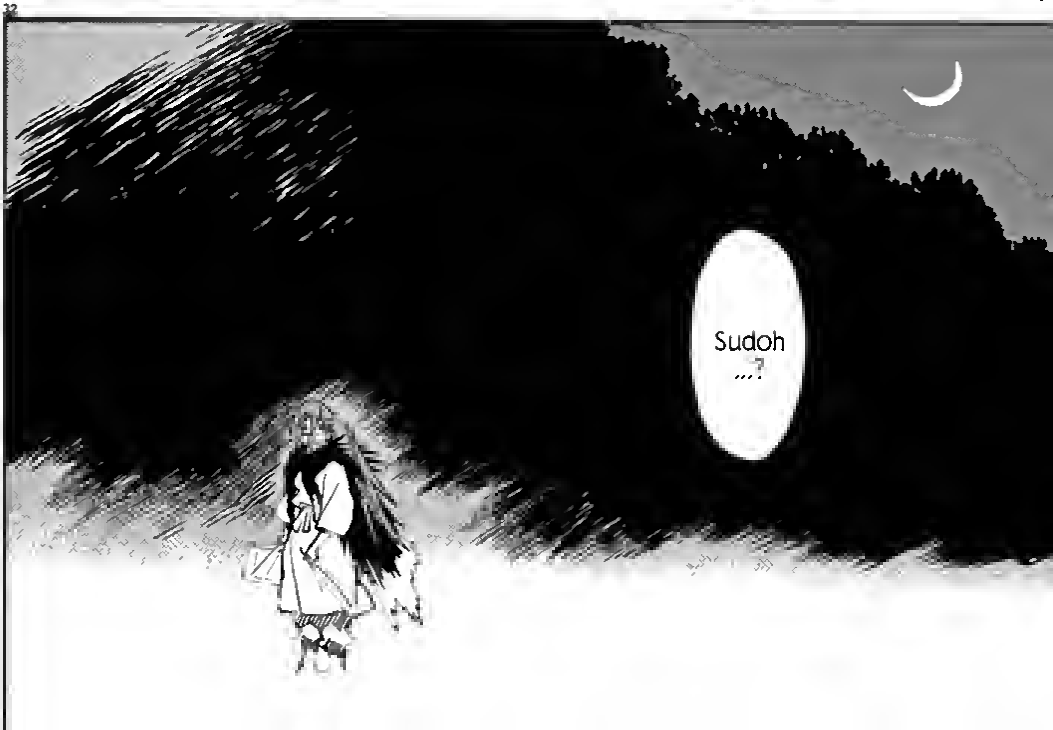

...If you touch Yurul, I'll lop off your head.
If you're asking me to lend a hand, I decline.
Veronika. So she got caught...?

Maybe they took it from him and dismissed him.
The day before yesterday. Probably on some assignment, and without anything that looked like the Voice of Jade.
Yurul left, riding alone.
You have time.
I made the guide stones go a roundabout way.
I'll wait for the Mongols coming after you.
I don't need help, but be prepared.
One day, I'll take your Voice of Jade too.

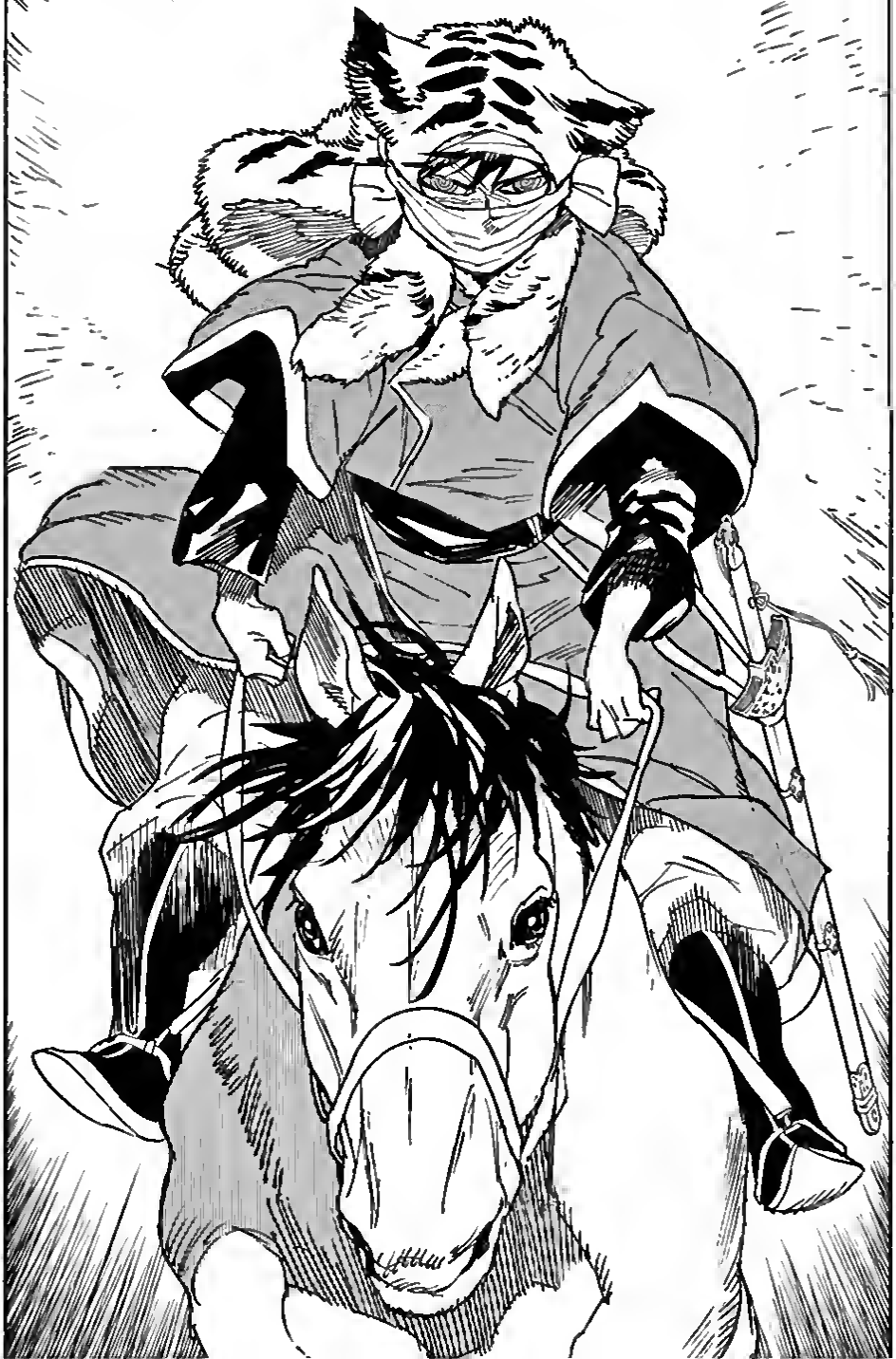
My throat remembers,
but it looks like you've forgotten your own fangs.
Shut Hell.
one look at you told me that you've lost your edge.

Somewhere, Yurui is waiting for us... alone.
That is what she wishes.
What are you doing with that girl?
She was with a man named Nalan...
Are you taking her with you?
Apparently he's dead.
On your revenge?

...Sudoh?
...Shall we go, Sudoh?


Sudoh ...?

[Chapter LXXXIIII] Throat



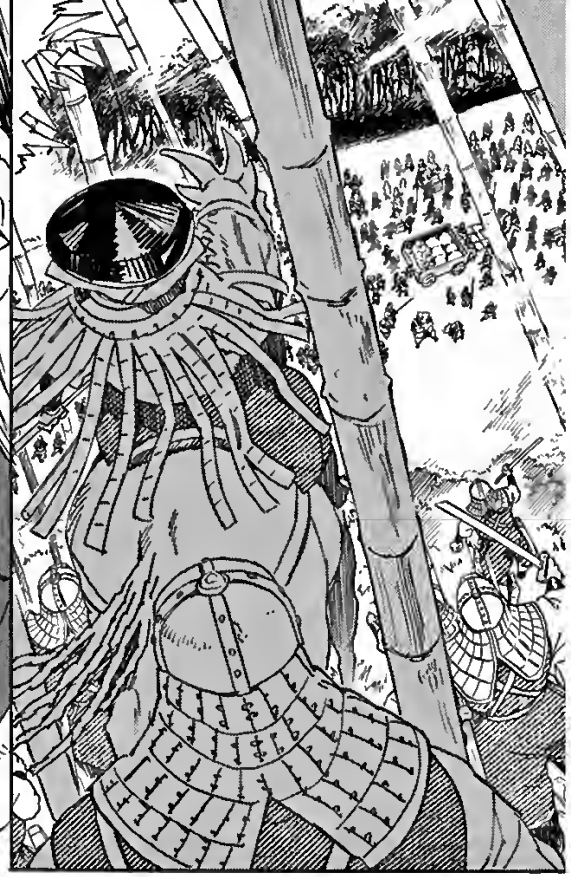
ヒヒーン!!
2
That's the tower.
Once, Sudoh said...
that I was kind.

It's because you're too kind yourself.
You just wanted me to be the same way.
"Swelling her ranks as she moves"
"Shuri Hō is gathering soldiers."
He found out that he was wrong
when I cut down Alunge here.
clunk
I never thought I'd come for this so soon.
3

It is because of this Tangut writing, Sudoh,
that you, me... and Shut Hell all wish...
for death.

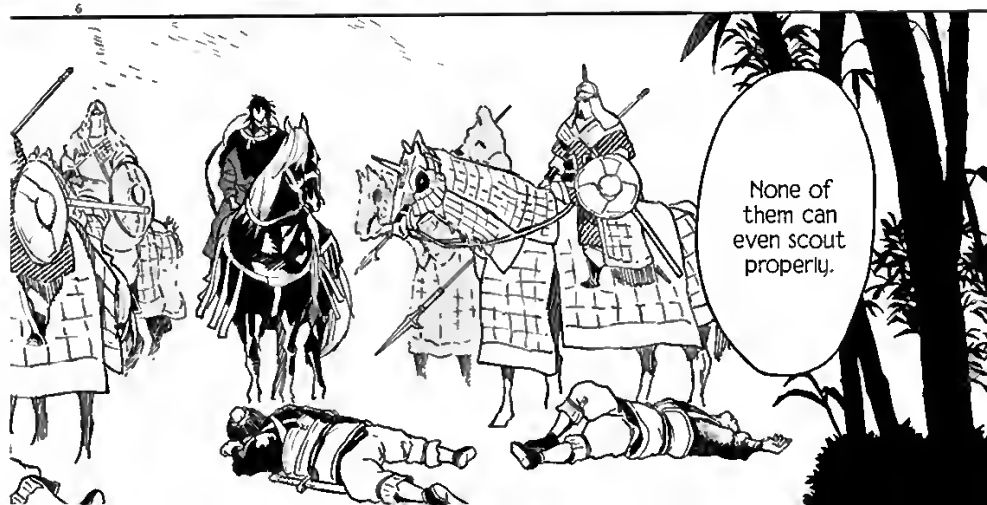
This stuff must be what they call "bamboo."
The air and trees around here are nothing like the ones back home.
You awake? It's been nothing but white since this morning.
Fog.
Gaji.
I can't hear any now.
We heard the cries of strange birds and monkeys when we entered Southern Song, right?
But our lookouts haven't said anything.
You can't use a bow in this fog, either.
Turn back.

A disorderly mob.
This rebel army is just a collection of scattered deserters.



This won't even be a battle.

Shut Hell has no skill in governing soldiers.


None of them can even scout properly.

It's a one-sided...
...Then he sent Yurul away
so that he couldn't expose this attack?
...Allow us to join the charge.
It looks like I won't even have to wait for Yurul to act
for Shut Hell's head and the remaining half of the Voice of Jade.

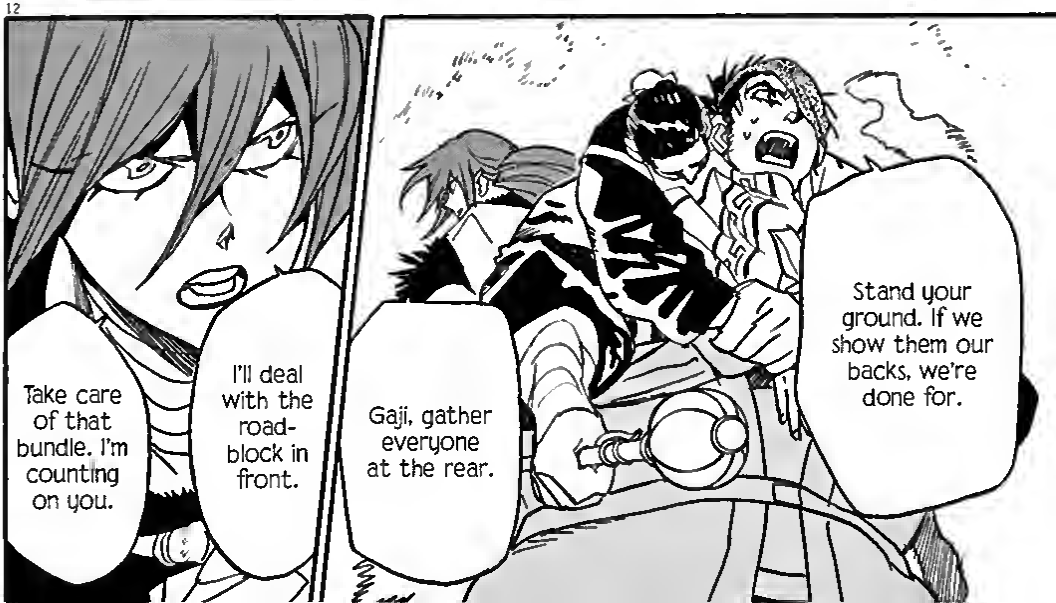
Keep back. We aren't fighting on the steppe.
They can't tell because of the fog and the ambush.
but now that we've left Jin and invaded Southern Song in pursuit of the Voice of Jade,
we're no great army ourselves.
We'll use you heavy cavalry for your imposing appearance.
...There's armored guys waiting up ahead.
Those are the guys who took out my old unit...

Where is Shut hell?
Where's the woman who killed so many Mongols on the roadside instead of the battle-field!?
10
You called?
slice
Go join your friends.
Oh, no need to thank me.
glug
guh

It was my pleasure.

Do not surround them completely.

At this rate we'll be cut off in back as well as in front!
If we don't run soon...!
Always leave them an escape route, so that they won't steel their resolve.
HEAVY CAVALRY
BAMBOO
AMBUSH
BAMBOO
Hit them again in the back when they run.
WESTERN XIA GROUP'S ROUTE

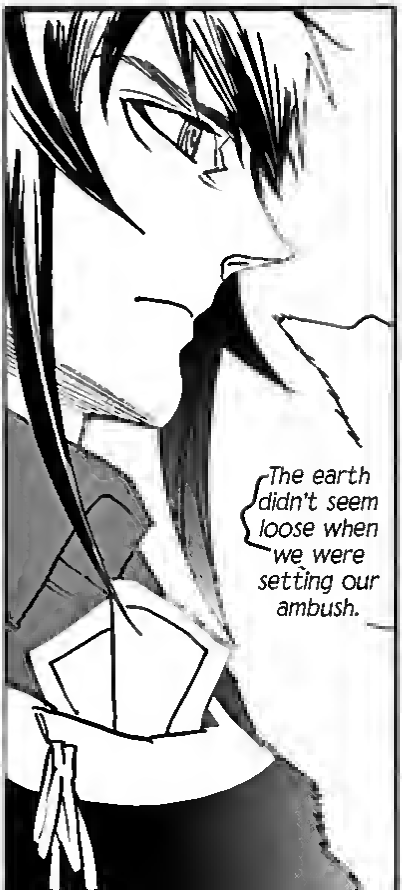

Take care of that bundle. I'm counting on you.
I'll deal with the road-block in front.
Gaji, gather everyone at the rear.
Stand your ground. If we show them our backs, we're done for.

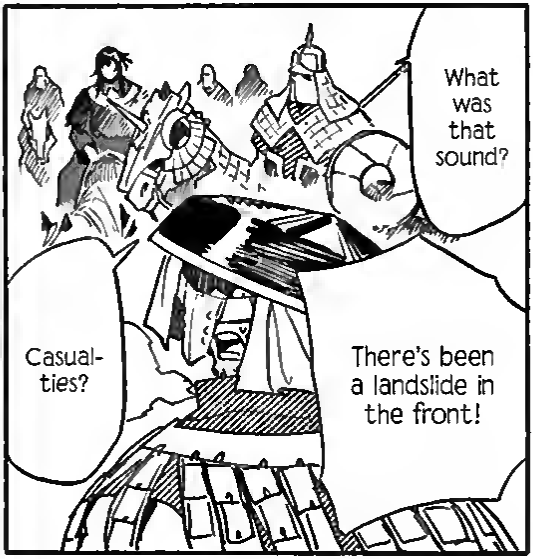
You've got to be kidding.
The armored cavalry are coming from in front...
I...
I'll stay.
I don't want to regret leaving you behind.
If you don't go, I'll kill you right now.
Gaji.

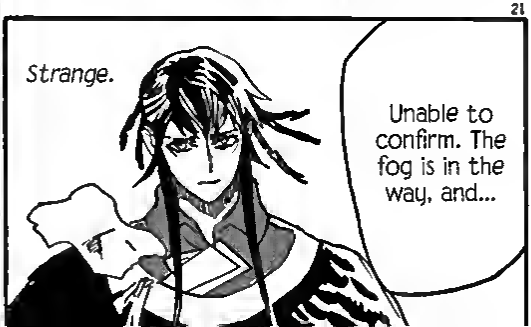
I'll make those toy soldiers my prey.
They can't spread out on a narrow road like this, and they can't make full use of their speed or weight, either.

Shut Hell's gone mad! She's charging!
Kill her!

If you still want it yourself, that is.
Then you'll have to lend a hand to stop that from happening, right?
If you die here, the Mongols get that bundle.
Think things through.
wild dog.
I see you've woken up.

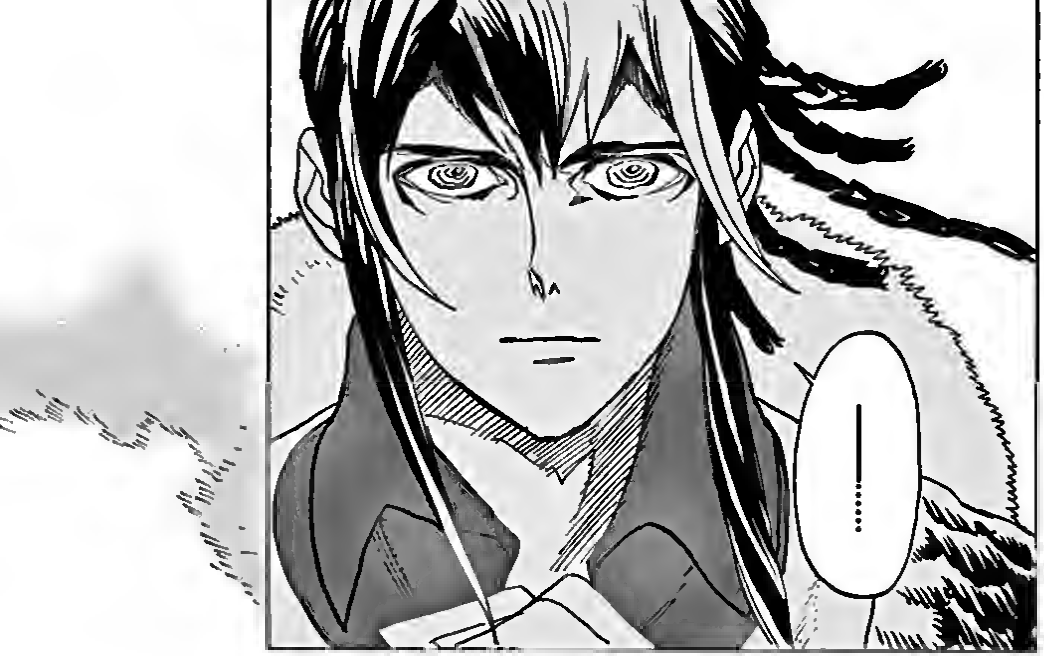

The earth didn't seem loose when we were setting our ambush.


What was that sound?
There's been a landslide in the front!
Casual-ties?

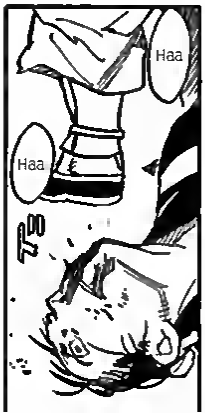

Strange.
Unable to confirm. The fog is in the way, and...

No sense staying long.
The cart carrying that woman – Veronika – and the other half of the Voice of Jade isn't here.
The commander is up ahead.
ヒヒーン!

It can't be.
whinney
...Harabal.


——……

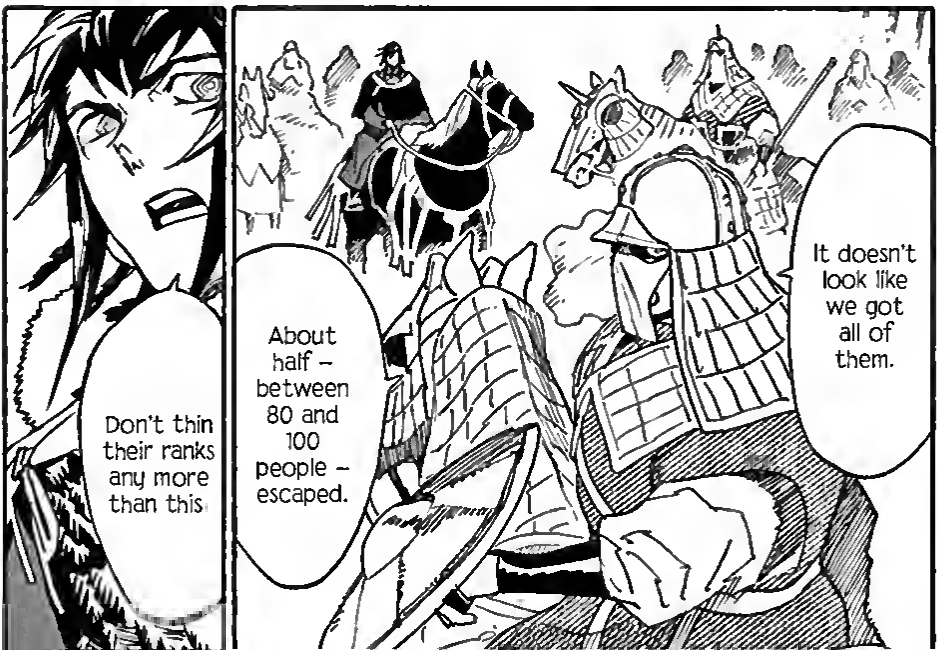
I think he's had it.
Gaji,
We made it out... somehow.

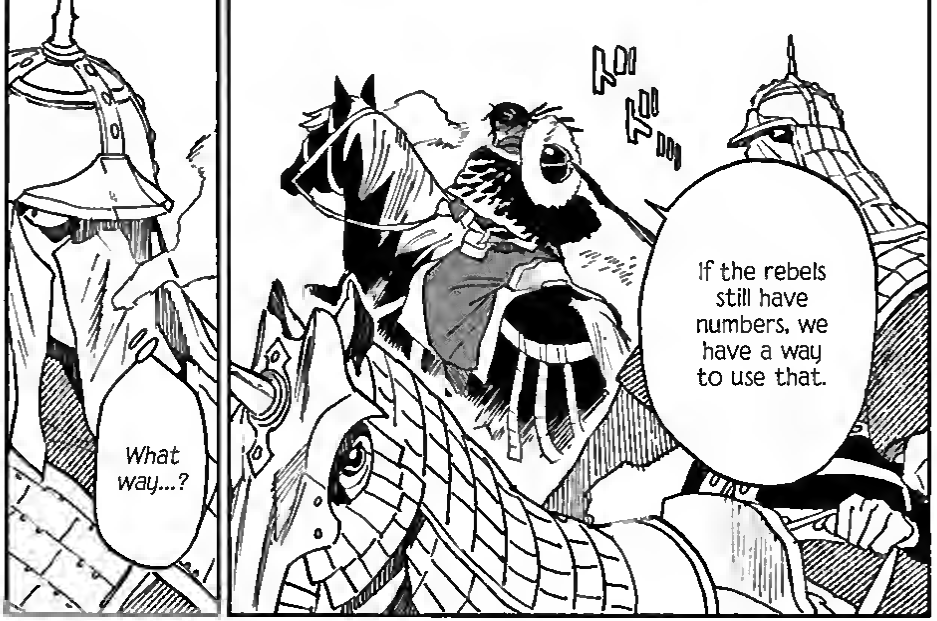

Haa
Haa

Huh?
Oh...

Where did Shut hell go...? Did she die, or...?
She's alive.
I'd better re-wrap this, too.

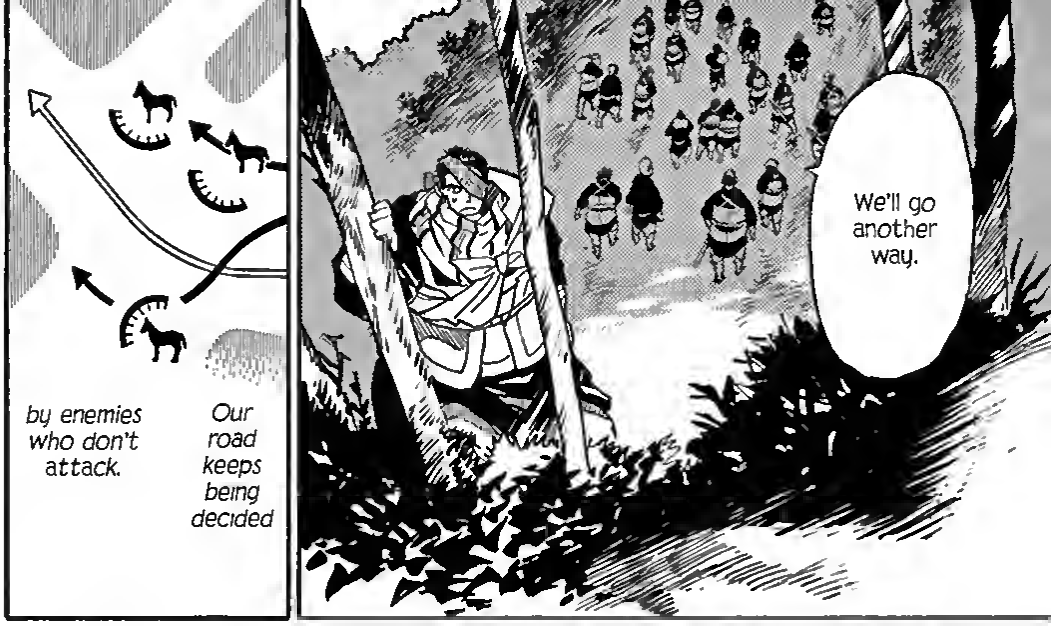
She'll be heading for Chengdu.


Don't thin their ranks any more than this
About half – between 80 and 100 people – escaped.
It doesn't look like we got all of them.


What way...?
If the rebels still have numbers, we have a way to use that.

No good. The Mongol's are watching that way.

We'll let them go.
But we will determine their escape route.


Our road keeps being decided by enemies who don't attack.
We'll go another way.

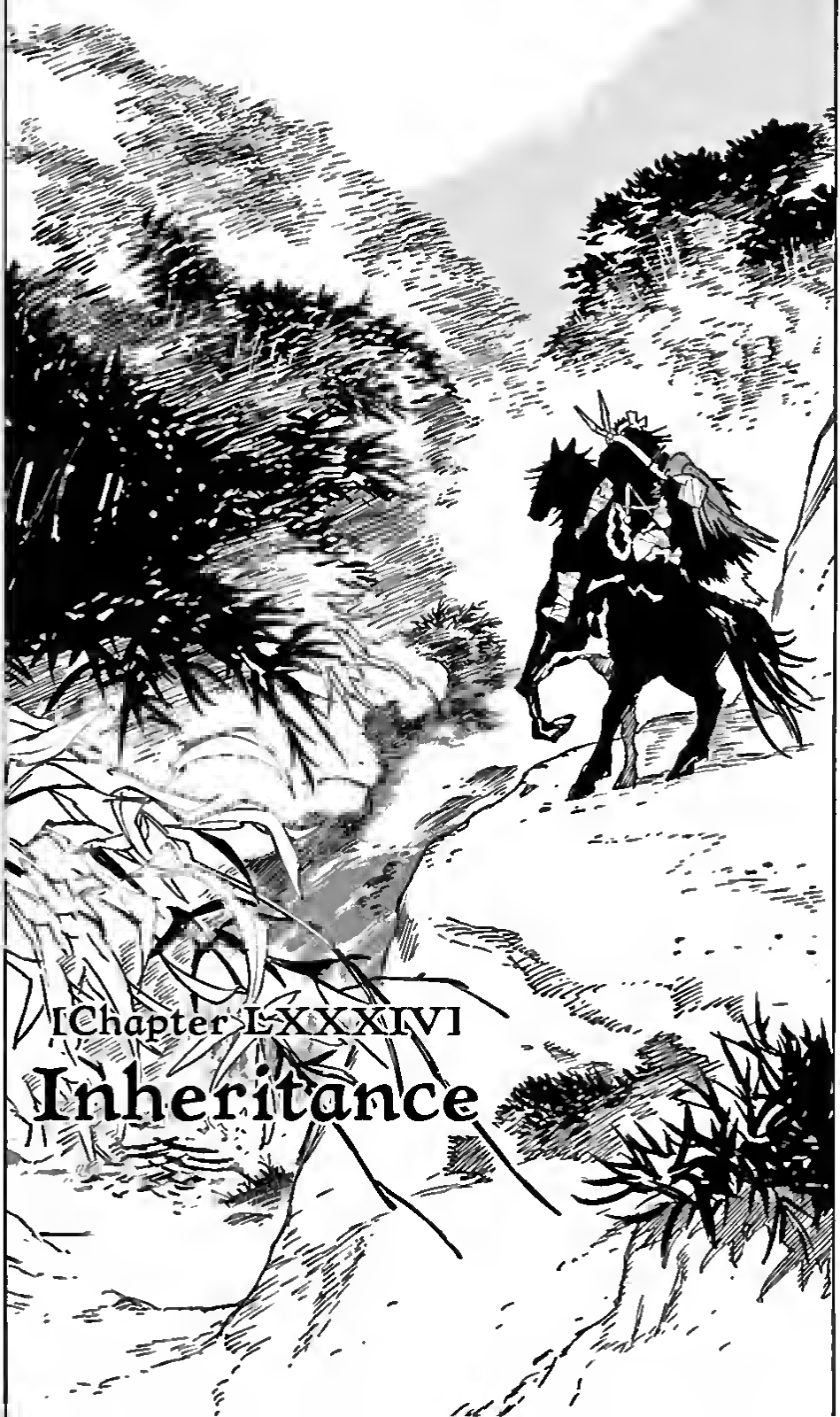
What's their game?
We're worn out. If they attacked, it would be easier than it was last time.

And why?
But where to?
Are we being forced to go the way they want us to...?

As Your Highness commanded,
we have herded them for a month.
They have nowhere left to run.
This place is called Dujiang-yan.
Those sandbar islands are their final destination.

It is this Sichuan region's vital point:
Chengdu's throat.

I made it in time...

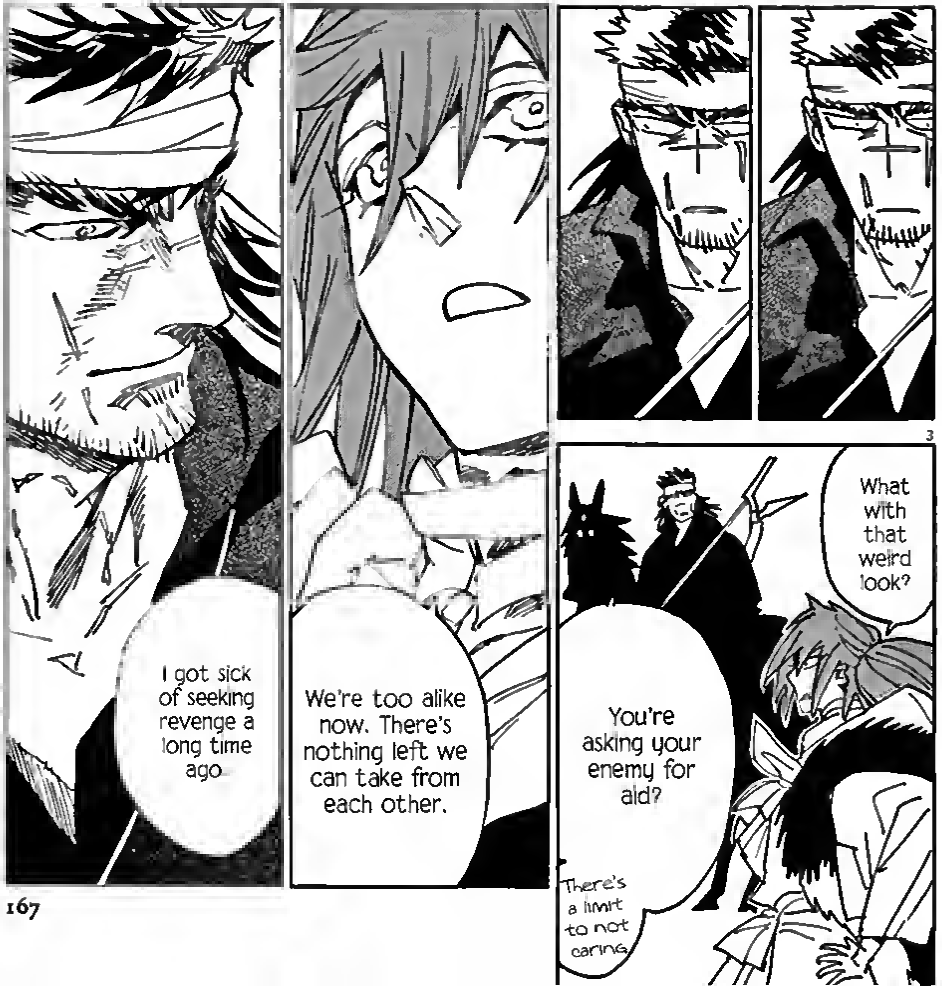


[Chapter LXXXIV]

Inheritance

...Where is the Voice of Jade?
You wouldn't have lent a hand if you knew
...He can tell by the weight?
What are you doing with those slabs of wood?
They're still being followed.
The comrades I helped escape have the Voice of Jade

If you don't want the Mongols to get it first, you'd better stick with me a while longer.


I got sick of seeking revenge a long time ago.
We're too alike now. There's nothing left we can take from each other.
3
What with that weird look?
You're asking your enemy for aid?
There's a limit to not caring.

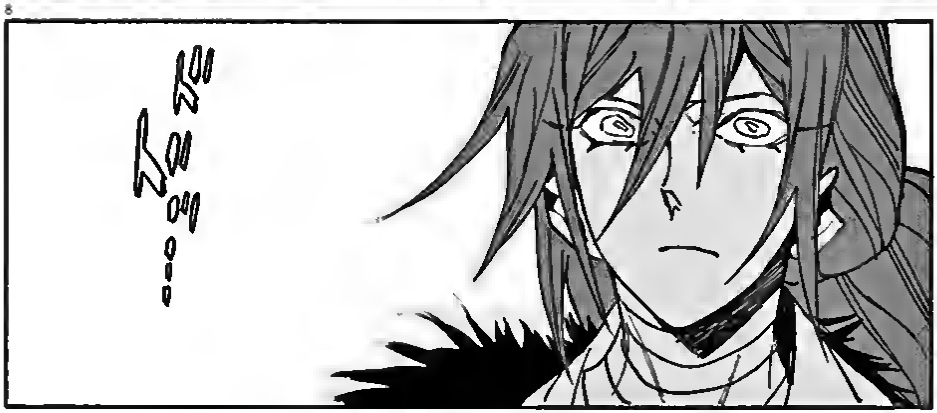
That's a relief...
...So, your vengeance was something you could just cast aside out of boredom.
...Revenge just makes trouble.

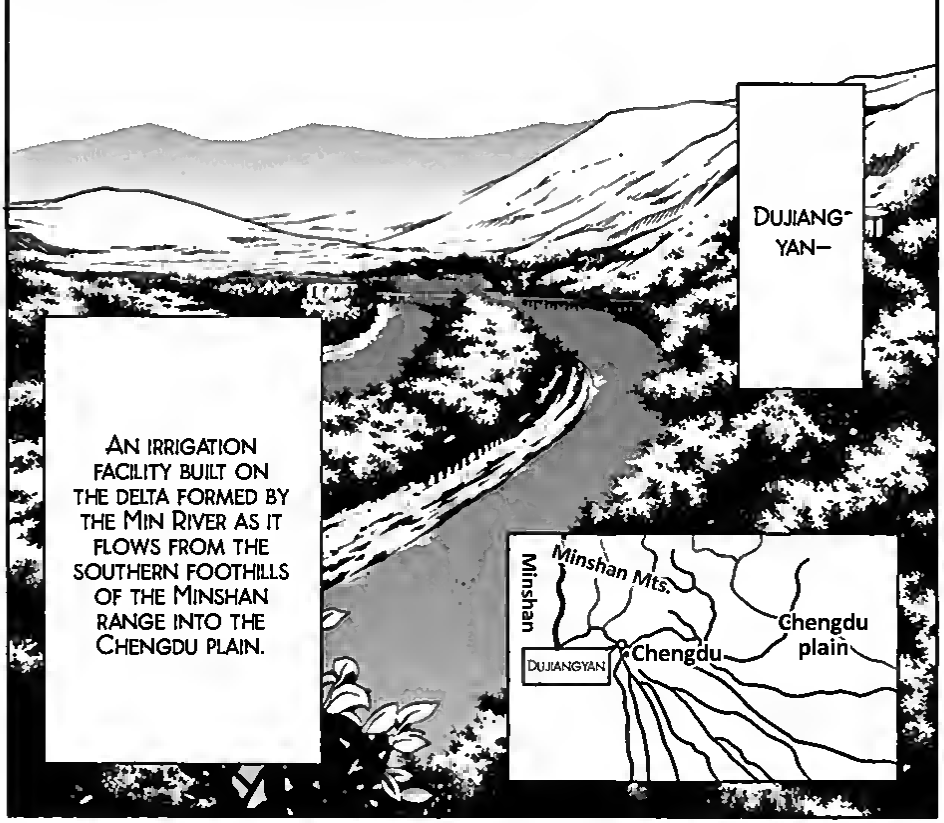
COULD YOU STILL SAY THAT IF YOUR YURUL WAS KILLED BEFORE YOUR EYES.
SHUT HELL?
ﾊﾟｼﾝ
ｶﾞｼ
You won't get your vengeance, even with those fire arrows.
Your death will have less meaning than a fly's.
Is that what the man who left you here would have wanted?

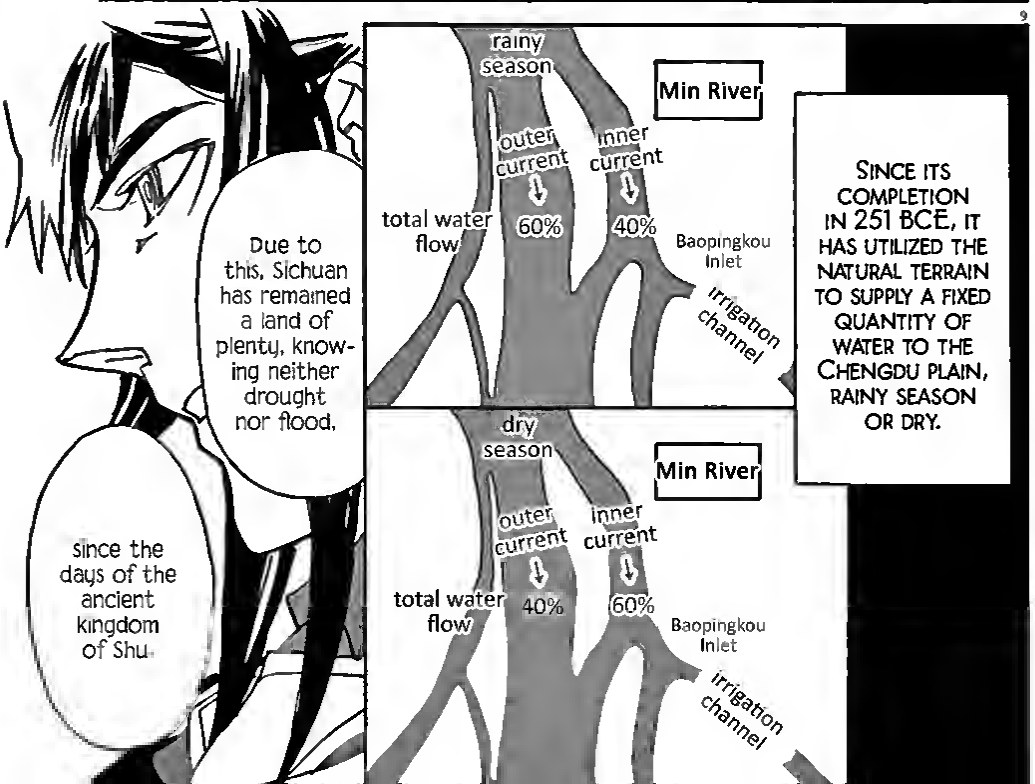
I DON'T CARE WHAT LORD NALAN WOULD HAVE WANTED!
...THAT MAN WITH LORD NALAN'S FACE.
the face I'd decided to live beside...
AS LONG AS HE LIVES.
I CAN'T START ANY OTHER LIFE.

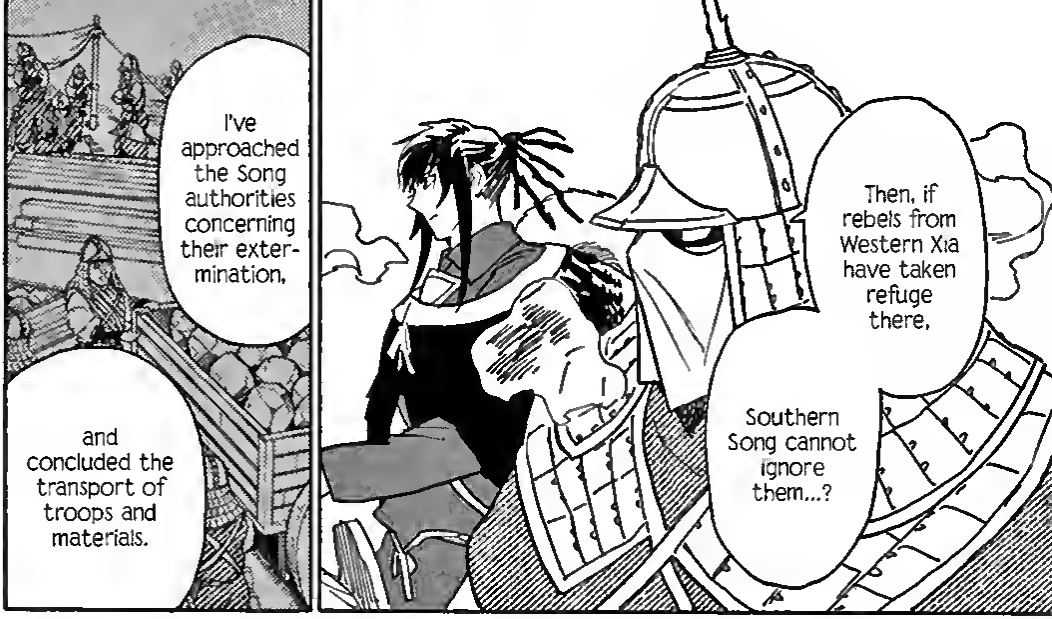
The man Melumi here is after is named Tolui.
The Mongol crown prince.
He has the other half of the Voice of Jade and the woman Veronika with him.
He also has the power to summon an army to deal with your gang.
Once his troops are in place, we'll lose our chance to snatch the Voice of Jade and the woman.
I have no time to waste with you.
But

I did enjoy running with you.


ドドドド…

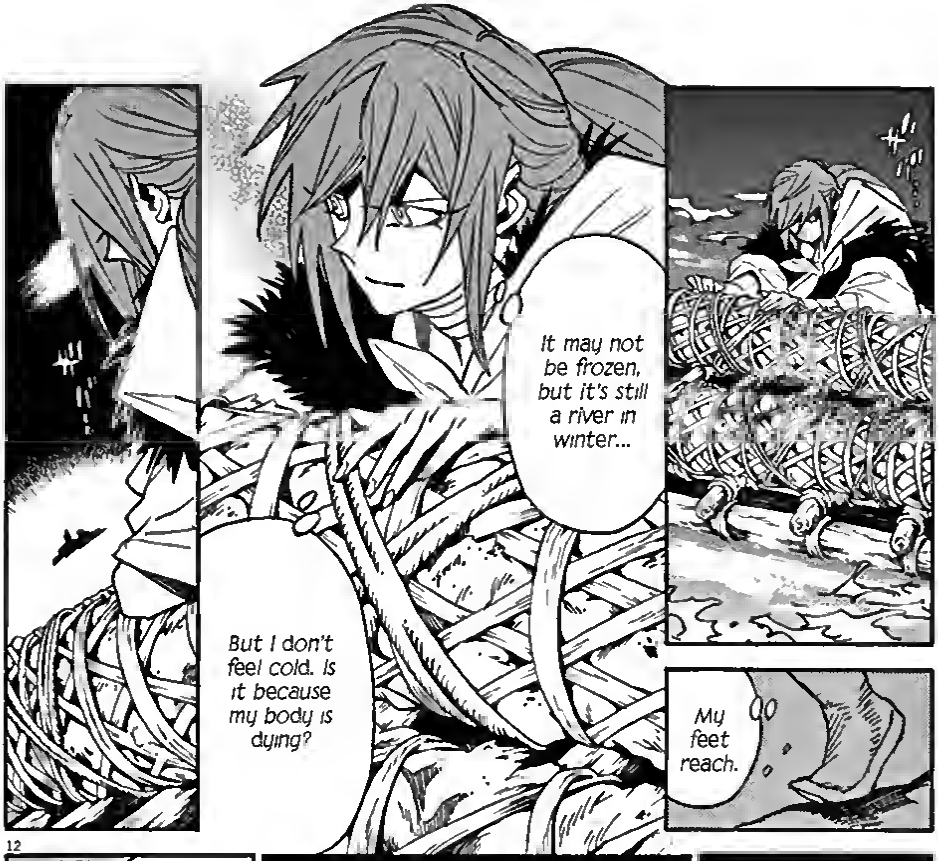

DUJIANG-YAN—
AN IRRIGATION FACILITY BUILT ON THE DELTA FORMED BY THE MIN RIVER AS IT FLOWS FROM THE SOUTHERN FOOTHILLS OF THE MINSHAN RANGE INTO THE CHENGDU PLAIN.
Minshan
Minshan Mts.
Chengdu plain
DUJIANGYAN
Chengdu


Due to this, Sichuan has remained a land of plenty, knowing neither drought nor flood,
since the days of the ancient kingdom of Shu.
rainy season
Min River
outer current
inner current
total water flow
60%
40%
Baopingkou Inlet
irrigation channel
SINCE ITS COMPLETION IN 251 BCE, IT HAS UTILIZED THE NATURAL TERRAIN TO SUPPLY A FIXED QUANTITY OF WATER TO THE CHENGDU PLAIN, RAINY SEASON OR DRY.
dry season
Min River
outer current
inner current
total water flow
40%
60%
Baopingkou Inlet
irrigation channel

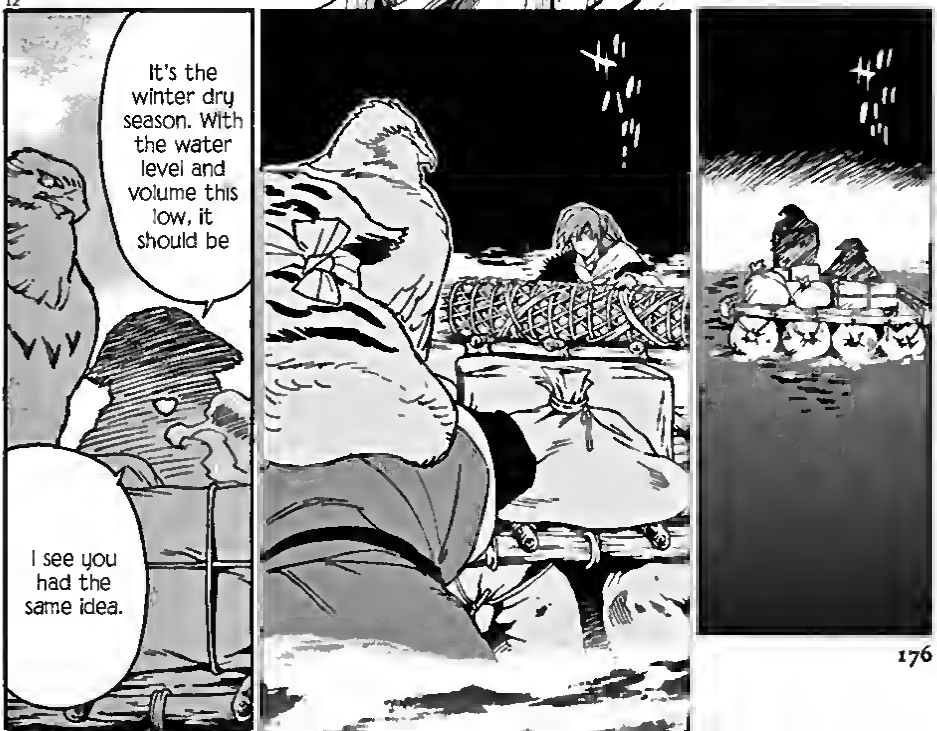

I've approached the Song authorities concerning their extermination,
and concluded the transport of troops and materials.
Then, if rebels from Western Xia have taken refuge there,
Southern Song cannot ignore them...?

Those should be assembled by tomorrow morning, as well.

We'll just have to search the rubble
for the fragments of the Voice of Jade... and Shut Hell's corpse.

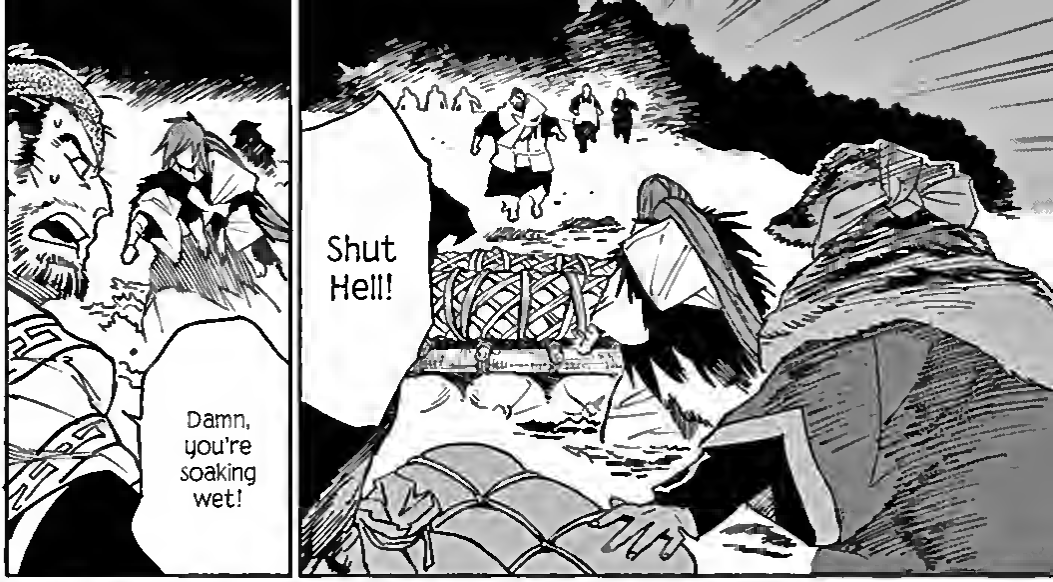

It may not be frozen, but it's still a river in winter...
But I don't feel cold. Is it because my body is dying?
My feet reach.

12


It's the winter dry season. With the water level and volume this low, it should be
I see you had the same idea.

Yurul.
cheep
It was a frozen river we met at before, wasn't it, Sudoh?

Shut Hell...?


Damn, you're soaking wet!
Shut Hell!

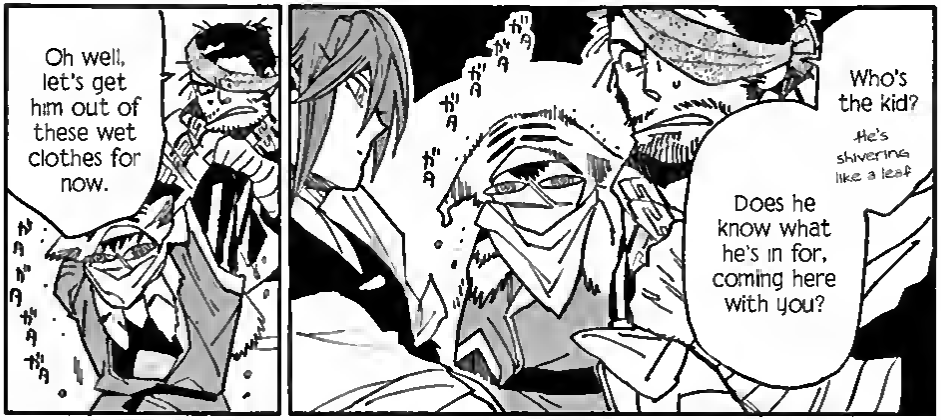
Shut Hell, you idiot, what're you doing coming to a dead end like this...?
You might as well have come to your death...

14

But I hung on to this for you.
Exchange it with the one you're carrying – our Voice.

We finally made it here, but there's nothing to eat.
Some of our friends have already died of starvation.

Yurui, you...
This raft's stocked full of rice!
Food!
Shut Hell's brought food!


Oh well, let's get him out of these wet clothes for now.
Who's the kid?
He's shivering like a leaf
Does he know what he's in for, coming here with you?

"...Of Western Xia"?

There's a fire on.
Undress in there. Inside.
ばさ

"...of Western Xia"? What...?
Don't try any funny stuff with her, kid.

So you really did teach them to read.

He did.
Did Sudoh tell you why I'm...
going to live with the Mongols?
Well then, this is where we...
This is goodbye, so...
Right now... I want to see your face...
hold your hands, and talk with you.
Shut Hell.

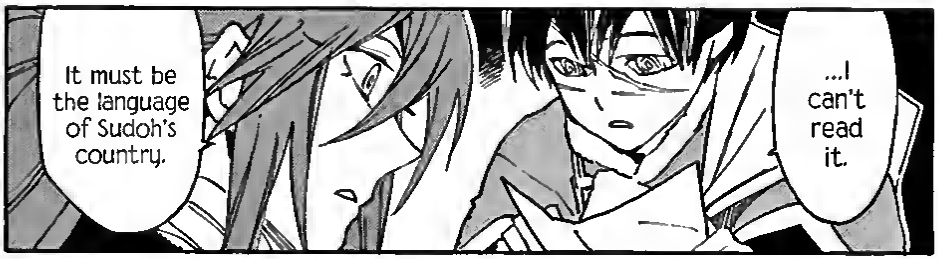
You have to die tonight.
and the Mongols will lift their siege.
I'll deliver your head, and the Voice of Jade,
As things stand, all your friends will be killed.
19
18
The friends you taught to read and write will survive.
They'll pass on our living Tangut script.

Don't screw up.
...I won't.
20
Here.
I hid this when I went to the Mongols. Give it to your friends.
やる。
It's a complete copy of the Voice of Jade. All 5,886 Tangut characters.
It includes the tablets you don't have.
Boldu and I made it. Sudoh used it to learn to read and write.

I will plant our writing among the Mongols.
And you?
That takes me back to when Sudoh was...
I'll make paper money for the Mongols, and put our characters on it.
I'll print it with the various languages of the Mongol territories, and make ours one of them.

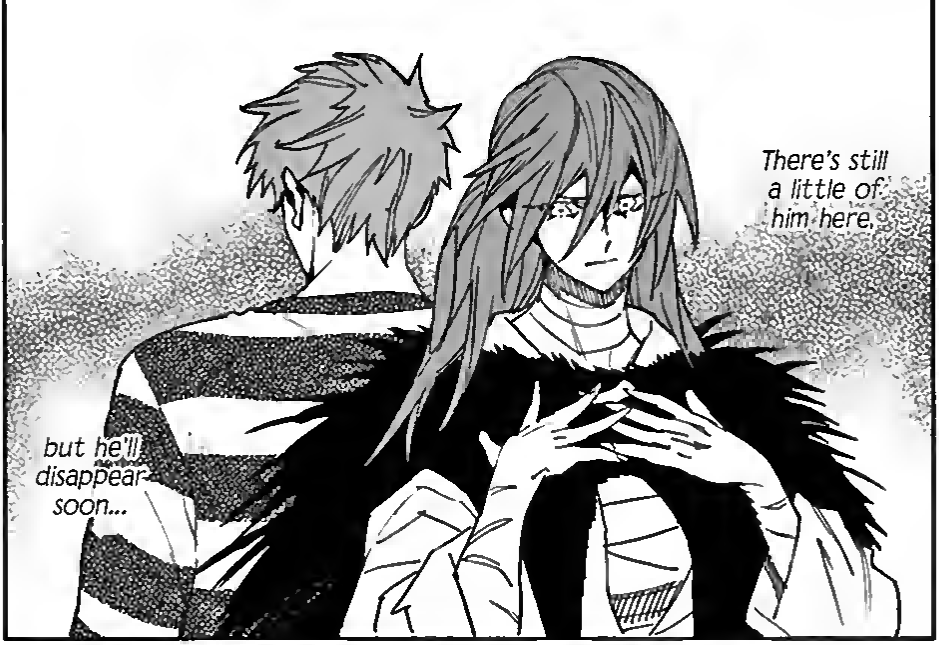
I won't do it out of sentiment for a lost country.
That's why I'll do it.
Wherever the Mongols spread, the Tangut script will continue to live and see use.
If Mongol territory continues to expand, they'll need paper money, lighter and more convenient than barter, or silver or copper coins.
but it helps that it will be during the reign of crown prince Tolui, rather than the current Khan.
I'll need time to gain power under him...
I'll have to wait for the Mongols to be far stronger than they are now to get people to trust paper like they do gold, silver and copper,
then I have something to give you too, Yurui.
If you'll live a long life for me,

Sudoh said he wrote this to your distant descendant.
so, unless you lose it, it should get to them some day.

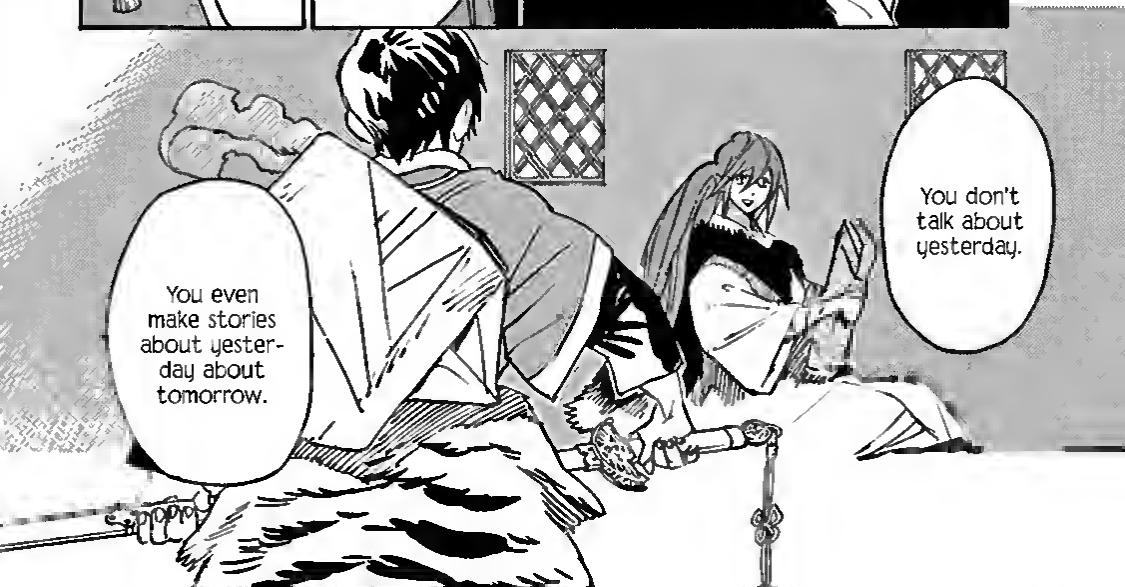

...I can't read it.
It must be the language of Sudoh's country.

23

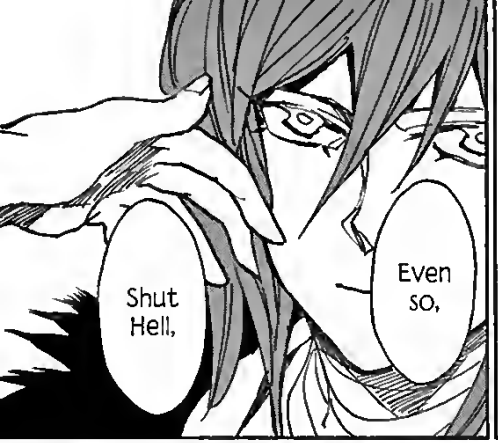
Sudoh got angry at me for not treasuring you enough.
Has he...
gone away again?

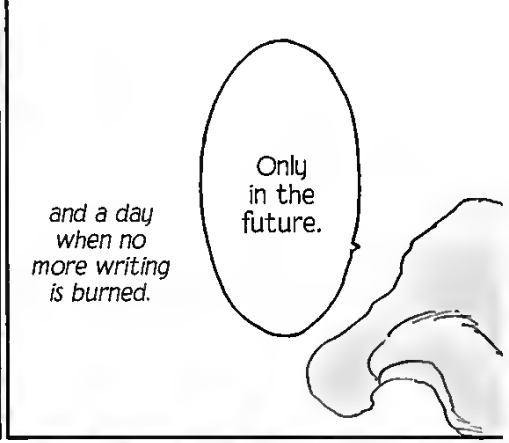

There's still a little of him here,
but he'll disappear soon...

Yurul.
Using something nostalgic for tomorrow...
If Gaji and the others use the same thing Sudoh did, I'm sure they'll learn fast.

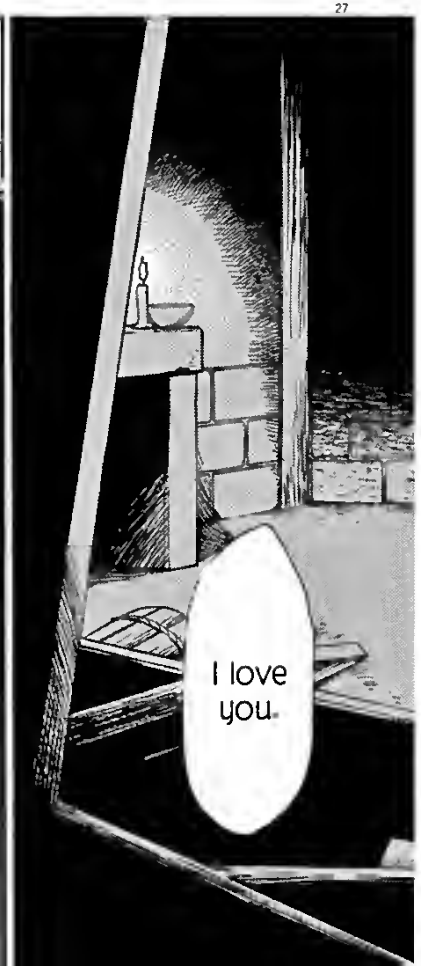

You even make stories about yesterday about tomorrow.
You don't talk about yesterday.

I like that you only talk about tomorrow.
I just like you.


Shut Hell,
Even so,


and a day when no more writing is burned.
Only in the future.

A place where the Tangut script is alive...
Everything I want is in the future.


I love you.

I love the you that's here now: the now that I'm with you in.
I...

Goodbye, Shut Hell.
Goodbye, Yurul.

Begin.

...Again.
32

To Be Continued in [Shut Hell] volume 14...

【手伝ってくれた人々】
井口文枝
大川亜由美
椿 克彦
前嶋重機
松山由希
渡邉忠司

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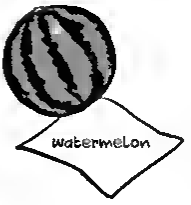
【装 幀】
孝橋淳二

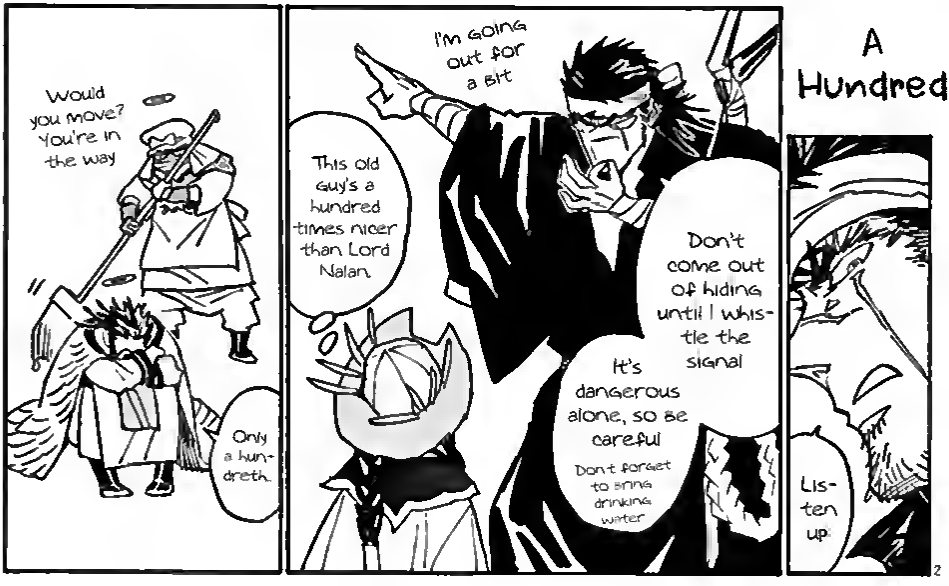
This Week's Izakaya Afterlife

Aaargh! Tolui's caught up with that woman!
That filthy woman's depravity will stain him!
It's you
Humph! So you're here,
Well, I'm glad about that
Is Isaha happy?
Oh, more news from the mortal world
Veronika's an angel! I'll steam you, Bird Boy!
Move. You're in the way
She's even wearing the hat straight
She doesn't care...?
Earth Live
I don't care what Lord Nalan would have wanted!

Please Guess



A Hundred


Would you move? You're in the way
Only a hundreth
I'm going out for a bit
This old guy's a hundred times nicer than Lord Nalan
Don't come out of hiding until I whistle the signal
It's dangerous alone, so be careful
Don't forget to bring drinking water
Listen up

シュトヘル13

ビッグ スピリッツ コミックス スペシャル

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